

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, November 7, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

No. 327.

NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 7, 1904.

Price 5 Cents.

THE PRINCE OF ROCKDALE SCHOOL; OR, A FIGHT FOR A RAILROAD.

By HOWARD AUSTIN.



"I'll save her yet!" he cried, springing up and throwing off his pea-jacket, at the same time kicking aside his low shoes. "No! Don't leave me! Don't do it!" groaned Squire Adams. But Rob, never heeding, plunged boldly into the lake.

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1938
ON RIVERBAND.

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The Prince of Rockdale School OR, A FIGHT FOR A RAILROAD.

By HOWARD AUSTIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE EXPLOSION ON THE SAILBOAT.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Three pistol shots rang out over the glassy surface of Lake Tuscola, waking the echoes of the moonlit landscape.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Three more followed, in such quick succession as to suggest the probability of the entire six coming from one revolver, as, in point of fact, they did.

And as each shot broke the stillness there burst a chorus of short, shrill screams, such as:

"Oh, my!"

"Oh, stop!"

"Ned Adams, I think you're real mean to scare us so!"

"Make him stop, Rob!"

"If he fires that pistol once more I insist upon going home!"

A big rowboat, filled with a jolly crowd, was the scene of these remarks; the hour was well on toward midnight, upon a certain date, some years ago.

The occupants of the boat were the pupils of Prof. Plummet's famous Mountain View Institute, which is located, as everyone knows, near the town of Whiteston, Conn., with Lake Tuscola in front, and the wooded slopes of the Berkshire hills behind.

Further than to mention that it was not usually permitted to the boys and girls of the institute to take midnight sails on the lake, but that on this occasion they had forgotten to mention that they proposed to remain out so late to anyone but old Mr. Mularky, the janitor, who had promised to leave the belfry door open for their convenience, no matter what time of night they should get in, we do not know that it is necessary to go into any further description, for Mountain View Institute was much like other large boarding-schools, with good boys and bad boys, bullies and prigs, boys ready for a lark, sober-sided chaps, and fellows full of fun.

Laughing at the terror of the girls, Ned Adams, who happened to be the owner of the pistol, proceeded to take out six fresh cartridges from a green pasteboard box and load up again, for

Ned was never so happy as when he was making somebody else feel uncomfortable.

So long as he could have his own way and boss things generally, Ned was a very affable young gentleman, but let anyone attempt to control his movements in the least degree and there was pretty certain to be a row.

"Oh, don't please, Ned! Don't fire any more!" pleaded Kitty Spencer.

"Now, do stop, Ned," said Addie Jones. "We were having such a good time before you began."

This was a fact.

The party had been away up at the head of the lake, and in spite of their transgression of the rules of the school in remaining out after hours, had enjoyed the jolliest kind of time singing in the moonlight, chatting, and telling stories until all of a sudden Ned pulled out the revolver and "just to scare the girls," as he admitted afterward, began peppering away at nothing.

Up to this time Rob Rockwell, Sam Dixon, Dick Ramsay, Pete Smith, and Jack Dyer, who, with Ned himself constituted the masculine wing of the party, knowing Ned's irascible temper, had not thought it wise to interfere, but now, feeling that something must be done to stop the nuisance Rob took up the ball.

"Say, Adams, you want to stop that!" he said, decidedly. "What's the matter with you? Do you want to spoil all our fun?"

"Mind your own business, Rockwell," returned Ned as he coolly proceeded to put a cartridge into one of the barrels. "You may be the prince of the school in the eyes of some of the fellows, but I'll be blamed if you'll boss it over me."

"Stop that! Stop that!" cried Sam Dixon. "Don't you try to get up a row, Ned Adams. What's the matter with you, anyhow? Do you want to have Prof. Plummet and all hands out to meet us when we come ashore?"

"No, but I propose to do as I please," retorted Ned, who had finished loading his pistol by this time. "If I fire my pistol it's nobody's business. That settles it."

"If Plummet knew you had a pistol he'd precious soon make it his business," exclaimed Rob. "What the mischief are

you going to do now? Are you going to fire into that sailboat?"

"Look! Look!" cried Susie Rockwell, Rob's sister, suddenly pointing in the opposite direction. "There's a fire over in Whiteston, right in the direction of father's mills."

And in this connection it may be well to mention that Rob and Susie were the children of Col. Rockwell, owner of the great Whiteston cotton mills, which for some weeks past had been in difficulties, owing to a prolonged strike of the hands there employed.

Ned's father was one of the richest men in the vicinity, well but rather unfavorably known from the fact that he held mortgages on at least half the real estate in the town.

"By George! there is a fire!" cried Rob, looking in the direction indicated by his sister.

It was certainly so.

In the distance the sky was illuminated with a dull red glow, which so increased in brightness as they continued to look that the church steeples of Whiteston could be distinguished thrown in bold relief against the sky.

"Good gracious! I do hope those dreadful strikers haven't set the mills on fire," cried Susie.

"It looks mighty like it, then," said Pete Smith. "There's a big blaze there, sure, and it's right in a line with the mills."

For the moment everybody forgot Ned and his pistol, and, indeed, Ned himself was too much interested in the fire to remember to shoot.

But Ned was not the fellow to give up an idea.

The school boat had meanwhile reached the narrow part of the lake with a run of no more than the quarter of a mile up the Pequonk River to the institute grounds ahead of them.

Close to the mouth of the river was a little wharf, with an old ruinous structure, which had once been a grist mill, behind it.

At the end of the wharf lay a trim little sailboat, with no sign of its owners visible.

All this the moonlight made plain as day.

"Here goes!" cried Ned, suddenly leveling his pistol at the sailboat. "Stop your ears now, and see me hit that box on the deck."

Bang! Bang!

"Stop him—stop him! He'll kill somebody next thing we know!" cried Sam Dixon, between the first shot and the second.

But there was no time to act between the shots.

As the second rang out, there was a sudden flash in the direction of the sailboat.

Boom!

Following the flash came a fearful explosion, lighting up the surrounding scene and sending the little craft flying into a thousand pieces.

"Oh, oh, oh!" screamed the girls, simultaneously.

"Great Scott! Now you've done it!" cried Rob, in dismay.

But his dismay was hardly greater than Ned's, still he would not have admitted that for the world.

"Don't care—I hit the box anyway!" he exclaimed.

At the same instant two men were seen running out of the mill. Some of the fragments of the boat had dropped all blazing upon the wharf, and now the wharf itself was on fire, and by the light the boys could see that one of the men carried a small box in his hands.

"Hey, hey, there! What the bloomin' blazes have you done?" roared the man with the box.

"Oh, Ned, you've got us into dreadful trouble!" moaned Kitty Spence.

"Pull, fellows, pull!" breathed Rob. "Perhaps we can escape without them finding out who we are."

"Might if Ned would sit down," snapped Pete Smith.

"Sit down!" roared Rob, for Ned was standing up in the stern.

"Won't do it, and you can't make me!" retorted Ned, disposed to be as ugly as possible.

"Can't, eh? You'll see. I'll let you know whether I can or not."

There might have been a collision between these boys then and there if the girls had not come to the rescue.

They caught hold of Ned and forced him down.

"Stop that boat!" roared the men who were running along the shore. "We know you. Someone's got to pay for this!"

"Pull, pull, fellows! pull for your lives!" cried Rob, and the boat shot into the mouth of the Pequonk, disappearing among the trees.

CHAPTER II.

NO. 8 AND NO. 10.

"Oh, you've got us into a sweet fix, Ned Adams," said Pete Smith ruefully, as the boat touched the little landing at the foot of the schoolhouse hill.

"Yes, and he won't be man enough to own it when the row comes," muttered Sam Dixon; but Ned, who had already started up the hill, thought it was Rob who had spoken.

"Shut up your head, Rob Rockwell!" he hissed, turning suddenly. "Don't you attempt to put on any of your airs to me, or I'll give you one."

"As it happens, I didn't speak," replied Rob. "If you have anything to give me, you'll find me quite ready to receive it when there's no ladies around."

"Oh, that's you all over. Always sneaking behind the girls."

"Hit him, Prince!" whispered Sam. "Don't let him bully you; you and he will have to have it out sooner or later, that's sure."

"I'm ready for you at any proper time, and don't you make any mistake about it," replied Rob, walking proudly up the hill past the bully.

All through the last term there had been trouble like this. Rob was the most popular boy at Mountain View Institute with everyone except Ned Adams and his set.

Hence the title which his schoolmates had bestowed upon him.

Rob Rockwell was the prince of the school; and this was not at all on account of the fact that his father was supposed to be a rich man.

Thus for a long time trouble had been brewing, and it might have broken out into an open fight now had not Pete suddenly given the school cry in a low, mysterious way.

"What's the matter?" asked Ned, glad of a chance to change the subject.

"There they come."

"Who?"

"Those two men! They've made as good time on land as we did on the river."

Running toward them at full speed over the meadow which skirted the hill on the left two men could be seen in the moonlight.

The fact that one carried the box showed them to be the same men that had come out of the mill after the explosion of the sailboat.

"Get, fellows," breathed Sam. "We want to get inside lively."

"Why, how funny their faces look," said Susie, who was all in a tremble.

"That's because they've got masks on!" whispered Rob, who had paused a little further up the hill. "I wonder who they can be?"

There was no time lost in making for the schoolhouse, nor, as it had all been arranged beforehand, was there any trouble in effecting an entrance.

In fact, the good-natured janitor had left the door of the old belfry, which stood partly in the school grounds and partly outside, unfastened for their express accommodation.

Just as the two masked men reached the top of the hill the last of the school party vanished through the belfry door.

This was Pete Smith.

"That's all right. We're safe now," he whispered. "But I can't lock the door. Mularky ain't left the key."

"Never mind. Slide upstairs! We'll get the girls into a peck of trouble if we should happen to get caught," whispered Rob.

In truth, it was all very wrong to disobey the rules of the school.

The little party had arranged matters so that their absence need not be discovered, and they had succeeded, but nevertheless the rules had been broken and trouble was sure to follow if they were detected in this misdemeanor later on.

When they reached the first landing in the belfry where there was a door leading into the dormitories, all paused to listen, but could hear no sound below.

"It's all right," said Ned. "They can't tell who we are. We'll never hear anything more of the boat."

But if Ned Adams could have heard the conversation taking place at that moment between the two masked men at the belfry door, he would have been inclined to entertain very different views of the matter.

"You are sure it was Rockwell's boy?" whispered one of the pair to his companion.

"Dead sure."

"And the others?"

"One was Squire Adams' son."

"Mean old hunks! Say, is the door unfastened?"

"Yes."

"Hold on then, till they've quieted down. We may as well stow it here as anywhere else. He'll think his boy took it, and that'll make him sick."

When Rob Rockwell raised the window curtain, just before tumbling into bed, he could see that the eastern sky was brighter than ever.

"Dear me! I do hope it ain't the mills!" thought the Prince.

He watched the light for a moment, trying to make himself believe that it was not in a line with his father's mills, when he knew perfectly well that it was.

Succeeding in this sufficiently to quiet his mind, he turned down the covers and tumbled into bed.

"Have you heard the news, Rob?" asked Ned Adams, when the boys met on the lawn after breakfast next morning, where they were accustomed to gather for an hour or so before the ringing of the bell which would usher in the duties of the day.

"No," answered Rob, pleasantly enough, for he had no desire to perpetuate the troubles of the previous night. "Don't tell me that Plummet has twigged us. I should be awfully sorry for the girls."

"Oh, 'tain't that."

"What, then?"

"Your father's mills were burned down last night by the strikers," said Ned, with a malicious grin.

"Great Scott! don't tell me that, Ned," cried poor Rob, for in true schoolboy style he had already dismissed the matter of the fire from his mind.

"It's a fact," said Ned, maliciously, "and what's more they

managed to open the safe and carry off ten thousand dollars and a lot of valuable papers. There was a fellow up from Whiteston this morning, telling us all about it. You may depend it's true."

Rob's face as he walked away showed how he felt.

He knew something of his father's difficulties where others did not.

For years Col. Rockwell had supported half the workingmen in Whiteston, but now just when business was dull and sales slow, labor agitators from New York had come among them, and the result was a strike for higher wages.

This and other troubles had brought Col. Rockwell's affairs into a pretty serious condition, and Ned Adams' intelligence, as may be imagined, drove everything else out of poor Rob's mind.

Nor had Ned overstated it.

Rob obtained leave of absence and hurried into town, where he found the mills in ashes, with everybody talking about the robbery and all sorts of wild rumors afloat.

But he did not find his father.

Col. Rockwell had taken the first train to New York to engage detectives to look into the business, so the old housekeeper told him.

As Rob's mother was dead and there was no one home but the housekeeper, he could learn no more, but he had heard enough to send him back to school in a most wretched frame of mind.

"I put a bee in his bonnet," chuckled Ned Adams, as soon as Rob left the playground.

"What do you mean?" asked Dick Ramsay, who was a perfect toady to Ned, saying yes to his yes, and no to his no, each end every time.

"Serves him right. He's a stuck-up little snoozer, anyhow," said Dick, after Ned had explained. "Prince of the school, indeed! That ought to be you, Ned, every time."

"Well, I think I deserve it," said Ned, complacently.

"Of course you do. You're the best runner, the best swimmer, the best fighter, and—"

"Come, come! That will do," interposed Ned, for such gross flattery was too much for even him to swallow.

"I was only going to say that you were the favorite with all the girls in the school," added Dick. "But if you don't want to hear any more I'll quit."

"Oh, well, a fellow can't help that, you know."

"Of course not. If the girls will get mashed on him, why, they will; but I say, Ned, I've got a plan to take the Prince down a peg. If you'll agree to it we can carry it out this very night."

"What is it?" asked Ned, curiously.

Dick came closer and whispered something in his ear.

"By George, that's a good idea! I never thought of that."

"It can be done."

"Of course it can. But what will the other fellows in the dormitory say?"

"Oh, they'll get in for it, every one of them. You needn't tell him you're going to lick him, you know. They'll think it's all fun."

But right here the ringing of the school bell brought the conversation to an end.

So great was the excitement all that day about the mill affair that everything else was forgotten, and not a word was heard about the sailboat.

Everybody crowded around Rob and Susie after school hours, expressing their sympathy, that is, everybody but Ned Adams and his crowd, who kept out of the way.

But the day ended just as all days, good or bad, end, and ten o'clock found the institute reduced to its usual nightly stillness, for every one except a few of the older scholars were

supposed to retire when the big bell in the old belfry rang out the hour of nine.

Now, the belfry was all that remained of the old school building, which had been removed some years before to make room for a more modern structure.

It stood against one corner of the schoolhouse, and the dormitories on the second floor had been extended into the odd old structure for a distance of ten feet or so, with an open space beyond the dormitory wall where there was a ladder leading up to the bell deck, and a short flight of steps leading down to the ground outside the school fence, thus enabling the villagers of Mountainview to use the bell in case of fire to call up the engines from Whiteston, in which town the ringing of the bell could be heard.

Five boys to a dormitory was the usual number at the institute.

Ned Adams slept in No. 8, Dick Ramsay occupying the next bed, while Rob Rockwell, Sam Dixon, and Pete Smith were in No. 10, which happened to be the dormitory which extended into the belfry.

We dwell upon these facts because they are necessary to an understanding of what followed Dick Ramsay's whisper, shortly after ten, of:

"Hey, Ned! Ned! Are you awake?"

"Bet your life!" answered Ned, from the next cot. Is it time?"

"Yes. Might as well make a start."

"Wake up the other fellows, then, and give 'em the steer."

Dick tumbled out of bed in a hurry, Ned getting up also and beginning to pull on his trousers.

"Come! Tumble up! Tumble up, you fellows!" cried Dick in a low voice, going from cot to cot and giving each boy a shake.

"What's the row!" growled Jack Dyer.

"Pillow fight," whispered Dick, proceeding to shake up the next boy.

"Hallo! Who with?" exclaimed Jack, sitting up in bed.

"With the fellows in No. 10," said Ned, adjusting his suspenders, "and I want to say right here that if any fellow in this dormitory don't want to go he can stay, but if he ever breathes a word I'll lay him out."

"Someone will lay you out one of these days," muttered Jack, but he made no objection aloud.

Nor did any other boy.

For some time there had been no pillow fighting in the dormitories, although some pretty tall stories were current in the school about the fights of former days.

Moreover, none of the boys felt that they could safely refuse, for if Ned Adams was not recognized prince of the school, as he thought he ought to be, he was most surely boss of No. 8.

"How are we going to get at 'em?" asked Dyer sulkily, as he began to dress.

Ned pointed to a trap-door overhead in the ceiling.

Like the belfry, No. 8 was once part of the old building, and this trap-door, or scuttle-hole, more properly speaking, had then communicated with the roof.

"What! Do you mean to crawl over the laths?"

"Yes."

"Pooh! You'll break through."

"No, we won't. Me and Dick tried it this afternoon," replied Ned, with stern disregard for the rules of grammar.

"And there's another trap in No. 10, and we're going to drop down on them like a thousand of brick!" said Dick, who had placed a chair upon his cot and climbed up on it.

Here it was an easy matter to push the trap aside, and Dick did it.

"You first, Ned!" he exclaimed, jumping down.

Ned climbed on the chair, and grasping the frame of the

trap after some interesting wriggling, managed to pull himself through.

"Follow your leader, fellows!" exclaimed Dick.

He jumped up upon the chair and pulled himself through the trap after Ned.

And after Dick went each boy in the dormitory.

Soon silence reigned in No. 8, but up in the ceiling strange sounds were heard.

An outsider, suddenly entering the dormitory, might have thought that an army of rats had been let loose.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MONEY.

"Hush! Not a word! Not a sound, fellows!" breathed Ned, as he went crawling over the dusty beams in the darkness. "We want to catch 'em dead to rights or not at all."

"Say, for heaven sake can't we have a light?" grumbled Jack Dyer, in total disregard of Ned's command.

"Oh, dry up, Dyer," retorted Dick. "What do you want? Mebbe you'd like to have me go out and buy a chandelier and hang it up in here?"

"Chandelier be blowed," growled Dyer. "What's the matter with lighting a match?"

"Say, will you fellows stop talking or not?" breathed Ned.

We forgot to mention that the last boy through the trap had passed up a pillow apiece, and each boy carried his pillow now, which, as may well be imagined, made the journey none the easier.

"How much further have we got to go?" called out one of the boys in the rear, who had not heard Ned's command.

"I'll come back and break somebody's head in a minute!" cried Ned, furiously angry, when all at once a dismal voice in the distance was heard calling:

"Say, boys! Where are you? Say, I'm lost!"

It was too much for Jack Dyer, who burst into a roar of laughter, the sound of which certainly ought to have reached No. 10.

Then Ned did as he always did when he found that he could not control his own crowd, grew very good-natured all in a moment.

"For Heaven's sake, Dyer, think what you are about!" he said, in a loud whisper. Then louder still he called out:

"Who is that?"

"Me," answered a faint voice away in the distance.

"Who the dickens is me?"

"Joe Ring."

"Pooh! It's only little Joe. Let him get out the best way he can," said Dick. "Pile ahead there, Ned, and we are after you. The dust is smothering me, and I want to get out of this."

Ned, who had previously explored the way, crawled on, and in a moment announced that he was at the desired spot.

"Found the trap?" whispered Dick.

"Yes. Hark!"

"Say, fellers, I'm lost!" called the dismal voice again.

"Confound Joe Ring!" snapped Ned, putting an ear to the trap. "I can't hear a sound down there, boys. Guess they're all asleep."

Slowly and with the greatest caution Ned removed the cover from the ancient scuttle.

All was dark below and profoundly still.

Of course, no word was spoken now.

The only sound to be heard was poor little Joe Ring scrambling about over the dusty beams, in the narrow space between the ceiling and the floor above, which had been built on top of the roof of the old building, thus leaving this space, which the pillow fighters had so successfully invaded.

It was a time to act and not to talk.

Ned took his pillow in his teeth, and dropping his legs through the opening, let go, his stocking feet striking the floor with a thud.

Now, if ever a boy expected anything, Ned Adams, as he stood there in his stocking feet and shirt sleeves, expected someone to spring up out of bed and sound the alarm.

Nothing of the kind occurred.

In a second Dick Ramsay came down.

He was followed by Jack Dyer and all the others except Joe Ring.

Still that same strange silence.

Very much perplexed Ned struck a match.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, as he gazed around.

Every bed was empty.

The boys from No. 8 had the dormitory to themselves.

"Sold out, by thunder!" breathed Ned, touching the match to a candle which stood on the mantel-piece.

He had no more than done so when a tremendous crash was heard, and a great square of the ceiling fell at their feet.

This was instantly followed by the noise of breaking laths, and down through the ceiling a frightened little fellow came tumbling, his face and clothing black with dust.

At precisely the same moment the door flew open, and the boys of No. 10, headed by Rob Rockwell, came bursting in just in time to witness the astonishing spectacle of a perfect shower of bank bills and glittering gold pieces which came raining down from the hole above.

Indeed, so astounding was the sight that the boys from No. 8, as well as those from No. 10, forgot what they were there for—for that it was their business to fight.

Not a word was uttered for a moment, nor a sound heard save the groans of poor little Joe Ring on the floor.

Meanwhile the strange shower had ceased.

"Well, this is a pretty how-to-do!" cried Sam Dixon, breaking the silence at last. "You fellows think you're mighty smart, don't you?"

But before anyone could answer, Rob, who had strode forward and picked up one of the packages of bank bills with which the floor was now strewn, suddenly gave a sharp cry.

"Great Scott! This is the money that was stolen from my father's factory! Ned Adams, is this some of your work?"

Ned was on a high horse in an instant.

"Don't you dare call me a thief!" he bawled, blustering up to Rob and slapping him in the face.

"A fight—a fight!" cried several voices.

"Lick him, Rob!"

"Smash him, Ned!"

"Lay him out, and stop his bullying once and for all, Rob." No. 10 rang with these and similar shouts.

"I'll do it!" breathed Rob, pulling off his coat, his eyes flashing fire. "This thing has been going on long enough. Look to yourself, Ned Adams! We'll soon see who is the best man of the two."

Ned was all ready.

In fact, he was spoiling for a fight.

"Lock the door! Don't let a soul in till they break it down!" breathed Sam Dixon.

Ned made a rush for Rob, who parried the blow skillfully.

At it they went hammer and tongs!

Thump!

Rob put in one on Ned's ribs with his left.

Suppressed cries of:

"Give it to him, Rob!"

"Sock it to him, Ned!"

"Cheese it, fellows! Cheese it! We'll have Jones in next thing you know!"

Jones was the under-principal, who, like the owl, was popularly supposed to be widest awake at night.

Then it was biff! whack! bang! thud! and down went Ned, with a force that shook the old belfry.

Up again and at it.

Blow followed blow.

The excitement grew tremendous.

Down went Ned again, when suddenly Jack Dyer, who had been keeping watch at the window, called, in a suppressed voice:

"Lay low! There's the light."

Instantly the candle was extinguished and the fighting ceased.

The light seen by Jack—and he had been watching for it—was in Prof. Jones' room, the window of which was commanded by the window of No. 10.

"Time!" whispered Sam Dixon. "Do you give up and call it a lick, Ned?"

"Not much," growled Ned, picking himself up off the floor. "When you say I had anything to do with this money, Rob Rockwell, you're a liar, and I'll make you eat your words. Just you wait! I'll get square with you!"

They could go no further with the business, now, and the boys all understood it.

Little Joe Ring, assisted by Pete Smith, had been gathering up the money.

"Say, Rob, it ain't my fault! I couldn't find my way, and the first thing I knew down I came!" he exclaimed, for Joe was a sensitive fellow, and somehow he seemed to be afraid that the blame of the whole affair was going to fall on him.

"Look here—are you fellows going to light out or not?" demanded Dick Ramsay, furiously. "Do you want to get us all licked? In another minute Jones will be here."

"Help me, Sam," said Rob, seizing a pillow-case.

The No. 10 boys looked volumes, but they did not dare to object.

Rob and the others thrust the money into the pillow-case, and by the aid of the boot-blacking box placed on a chair all managed to pull themselves up into the cock loft.

Ned Adams kept up a steady growl, but he did not offer to stop them, nor did any of his companions.

The matter of the money had disturbed all hands, and Ned's defeat had settled any fight there was left in No. 10.

"I s'pose you'll give us away when you're asked who broke the ceiling?" sneered Sam Dixon, who was the last to ascend.

"Well, I guess we're no meaner than you are?" retorted Dick Ramsay. "I'd lick you single-handed now, Dixon, if it wasn't that I don't want to have No. 10 shut off from the ball to-morrow night."

Now, the ball was a masquerade dance, to be given the following night by the Whiteston social club.

Every boy and girl at Mountainview expected to be present and have a jolly time, so to be cut off from that would have been a punishment indeed.

The boys of No. 8 now crept back through the cockloft into their dormitory.

Not, however, until Rob Rockwell, by the aid of matches and at the imminent risk of setting the institution on fire, had gone on a short tour of exploration to find out where the fallen cash had come from.

He found a small wooden box without a cover lying bottom

CHAPTER IV.

OFF DOWN THE LAKE.

Biff!

Ned Adams took Rob in the jaw with his right.

upward on the laths near the hole through which Joe Ring had fallen.

There were a few \$20 gold pieces lying around on the laths, but that was all.

How the box came to be in the cockloft was a profound mystery.

As for little Joe Ring, he knew absolutely nothing about it until he heard the gold pieces rattling down after him through the hole.

For about half an hour the boys in No. 8 lay quietly in bed waiting for the explosion which they felt was sure to follow Prof. Jones' visit to No. 10.

But they waited in vain.

At last Prof. Jones' light was extinguished.

It began to look as though there was not going to be any explosion after all.

For some time profound stillness had prevailed in No. 8, when suddenly Rob Rockwell slipped out of bed and began to pull on his pants.

"Hey, Sam! Are you asleep?" he whispered.

"No; wide awake! What you going to do?"

"I'm going to carry this money to father."

"What! Not to-night?"

"Yes, to-night, and you are going with me."

"I'm with you in everything, old man."

"I know that."

"How are you going?"

"By boat, I guess. Anyhow, I'm going. If I wait till morning there's no telling what desperate thing father may do in the meantime. I may be delayed. Old Plummet may have other ideas about it. Don't you see?"

"Oh, I don't know and I don't care. I'd like no better fun than going with you, Rob," whispered Sam, tumbling out of bed. "We can run down the lake and be back before school opens. No one will ever know."

"Right you are. Other fellows all seem to be asleep."

"They are asleep."

"So much the better."

"Say, Rob!"

"Say it."

"You're dead sure the money belongs to the governor?"

"Why, the mill mark is on every bundle of bills, Sam."

"Then that settles it. I've not another word to say."

There was no difficulty in getting out of the schoolhouse.

All the boys had to do was to open the door, steal along the passage to its end, where there was another door communicating with the belfry stairs.

Sometimes this door was locked and sometimes it wasn't.

This proved to be one of the nights when it wasn't, and as the key of the belfry door at the foot of the stairs was usually left in the lock, Rob anticipated no trouble on that score, and met with none.

In a few moments they were safe outside the schoolhouse, creeping down to the lake shore where there was a boat-house in which Rob kept a natty little sailboat, called the Raven.

It was just midnight when all was ready and the Raven started down the lake.

Rob put on an old pea-jacket which he always kept on board, and took the sheet, assigning Sam to the stern.

The money restored to the coverless box, and carefully wrapped up in paper, was stowed in the bow seat locker.

As they started out from the boathouse Sam held up his hand to find the way of the wind.

"Northeast, what there is of it," said Rob. "There'll be more when we get well out in the lake."

"Looks to me as though it was going to rain," said Sam, for the sky was thick with clouds.

In order to get a good start it was necessary to run the Raven out nearly opposite the mouth of the river.

Instead of getting more wind now as Rob had predicted, they found less, and more than that, a thick mist came sweeping down upon them, obscuring everything and wetting them almost as much as rain.

"Infernally disagreeable," growled Sam. "I never expected this."

"I wouldn't wonder if we ran out of it by the time we got to Parker's Island," said Rob.

"I can't hardly see the shore," said Sam, looking back. "If we don't get more wind than this, Bob, I'm afraid we won't make it."

"Oh, there'll be wind enough by and by."

"What's that light down low—there by the mouth of the river?"

Rob looked back. Sure enough there was a light close down upon the water.

"It's moving—it's a boat as true as you live!" cried Sam. "Look here, Rob Rockwell, I don't like this."

"Don't like what?"

"We've got a big lot of money on board, old man."

"Well, don't I know it?"

"How the deuce did that money come to be in the cockloft, Rob? I've been waiting all this time for you to say something, but you've never opened your mouth."

Rob went on the other tack before answering.

"Watch the light, Sam," he quietly said.

"Well, I'm watching it. What of it?"

"Watch!"

"By George! they've tacked, too. It is a boat."

"Yes, and it's following us."

"Who do you think it can be?"

"Don't ask me, Sam, but I wish this money was safe in father's hands!"

"How much do you s'pose there is?"

"Oh, ever so many thousands. How can I tell? I haven't counted it, Sam."

"By George, they're overhauling us; they've got a better boat than we have."

So intent were the boys in looking back that they forgot to look in the direction they were going.

If Rob hadn't happened to turn his head just at that moment, there would have been a crash.

"Look out, you lubber! Where are you going?" Sam heard him yell.

There was a small catboat within ten feet of them coming up the lake.

Rob made a move to tack, but something gave way, and down came the sheet all in a heap, burying him out of sight.

"What's the matter with you? Are you asleep? Why don't you show a light?" roared Sam, as the boats passed each other with only a foot or two to spare.

There were two men in the catboat. Both were drunk, and one was a rough saloon-keeper in Whiteston whom Sam slightly knew.

"Hello! That you, Sam Dixon?" he called, thickly.

"Tain't anybody else! Where's your light?"

"Hain't got no lantern. Say, heard the news?"

"What news?"

"It's all over town that Rob Rockwell robbed the old man last night, while the mills was a-burning. Some say he kindled the fire."

"Me an' Mr. Crook is going up to the academy fer to arrest him. So-long."

As they glided out of hearing Rob put his head out from under the sail with a face whiter a good deal than the canvas which had covered it.

"I expected it, Sam!" he gasped. "I've expected it ever since I saw the money. This is a put-up job to ruin me!"

CHAPTER V.

THE AFFAIR WITH THE STRIKERS.

"Pshaw! I don't believe it!" cried Sam Dixon just as Rob, having tied the broken halyard, ran the sail up in place.

Sam had not spoken until now, although it was at least two minutes since Rob came out from under the sail.

The truth is, Sam was wondering how the money ever came to be in the cockpit.

As he found no particular satisfaction to be derived from wondering he promptly gave it up, and made up his mind that thick or thin he would stick to Rob.

"You may believe it or not, it's so, Sam."

"Do you know anything more than I know?"

"Not a thing."

"Then I don't believe it. Lucky thing for you, though, you were under that sail. Do you know who those fellows were in the boat?"

"Why, 'twas Nick Gallon, wasn't it, and Constable Crook?"

"Yes. I wasn't sure that you knew."

"Only that I had the money with me I should have come out and faced Mr. Crook," said Rob.

"They were both full—there would have been a row."

"I wasn't going to give up the money to a ginmill-keeper and a drunken constable."

"Certainly not."

"I'll put that money in father's hands if I die for it, Sam Dixon. Say, where's the light?"

"Gone, by George!"

"It's the mist—it's too thick for us to see it."

"It's a regular fog, and we've got to look sharp, or we'll run on to Parker's Island. No more talking for a few minutes, old man."

From that on until they were almost at the mouth of the narrow channel which ran between Parker's Island and the mainland, not a word was spoken, for the wind had begun to freshen, and was decidedly squally, to say nothing of the increasing thickness of the fog blown with it up from the sea.

It was a dangerous spot, those narrows by Parker's Island.

The island itself was high and bluffy on the side toward the water, descending on the other side, where a stretch of swamp separated it from the shore. Indeed, it would have been no island but for a narrow creek.

Thus there was only one way to go, through the Ramshorn, as the channel was known, on account of its crookedness.

Just as Robert Rockwell ran the boat into the Ramshorn a furious squall struck her, driving her over toward the picnic grounds on the island.

"By Jove!" shouted Sam, drenched in a moment by the rush of rain.

"Stand by, there!" roared Rob. "Furl the jib. It'll be all right in a moment once I get her in the wind."

"Help! Help! Save me!" a voice came shrieking above the storm at the same instant.

"Great Scott! What's that?" cried Sam.

"Somebody overboard! There's the other light, Sammy!"

"There's lights on the island."

"Campers out, I s'pose! It's all right now. I'm going to run into Pot Cove and wait till this rain is over. I can't make out where I'm going, it's so blamed thick."

Pot Cove was on Parker's Island. It was right at the foot of the bluff on which the picnic grounds were located.

In about five minutes Rob had run the Raven up against the little wharf and dropped the sheet.

Once again the cry for help had sounded, but after that they heard nothing.

"Let's go up the hill and take a look from the observatory on the picnic grounds," said Sam. "We may as well do that as to wait here."

"Oh, we'll only get all wet. We'd better stay where we are."

"Come up on top of the bluff, anyhow. I want to know who those fellows are. Do you know, Rob, I have an idea?"

"That No. 10s are onto us. That it's them?"

"Exactly."

"I thought so all along, and I believe that cry for help was only a fake on Ned Adams' part to get us over there."

"Well, are you going or not?" persisted Sam, who seemed determined to leave the boat.

"Oh, come on, if you are so dead set on it," replied Rob. "But I can't leave the money here."

"Take it with you, then."

"Just what I'm going to do," said Rob, bending over the locker.

He took out the package, and putting it under his arm, they started up the steep wooden steps built against the bluff for the accommodation of the picnickers.

The scene on the top of the bluff was a dreary one—what can be more dreary than an open-air pleasure ground, desolate and deserted on a stormy night in the fall.

The boys paused at the head of the steps and turned to look off over the Ramshorn, when all at once a loud shout was heard on the pier, and a number of men came running out of a little shelter house behind them, while at least half a dozen had suddenly made their appearance at the foot of the steps.

"Great Scott! What's all this?" gasped Sam.

But Rob thought only of the money, for the men at the foot of the steps were yelling as they came up:

"Lay him out, boys! Lay him out! It's Col. Rockwell's son! It was him what blew up our boat!"

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MINNEWANNOCK.

"Strikers!" gasped Rob.

"Bet your life! What shall we do?" echoed Sam.

What could they do?

They could not be expected to stand up against a dozen men, and there were more than a dozen rushing upon them now.

"The money! We mustn't forget the money!" breathed Rob. "Make for the grove, Sam! We can get down the side of the bluff and double on them and get to the boat."

The grove was a thick clump of trees just ahead of them, and into it the boys plunged, running at the top of their speed.

But it could not be expected to afford them shelter for more than a minute.

As they entered it a shower of stones flew after them, the strikers yelling out all sorts of unpleasant things about Col. Rockwell as they turned in pursuit.

But Rob and Sam possessed one great point of advantage.

They knew their ground, having many times been on the island before, whereas the strikers evidently knew very little about it.

"Make for the gully," breathed Rob. "We can crawl down through the blueberry bushes."

They reached the spot in a moment and none too soon, for their pursuers were close behind them.

Here a deep cut had at some former time been washed out of the side of the bluff.

It was thickly overgrown with bushes now, and knowing just what he was about, Rob jumped down into them without fear.

Sam followed.

"Don't move! Don't breathe!" whispered Rob. "There they go, the fools! They think we're ahead of them still."

"Where are they? Which way did they go, fellers?" they could hear the strikers shouting.

But they ran right by the gully and "never tumbled," as Rob expressed it.

In a moment though their shouts could still be heard the sound of their footsteps had died away.

"Now's our time!" said Rob.

They plunged on through the bushes and soon reached the sandy beach at the foot of the bluff, but when they walked around in sight of the pier their hopes were dashed by seeing a crowd of strikers moving about upon it, examining the boat.

"By George, here's a mess," muttered Rob. "What are we going to do now?"

"We've got to wait."

"But we can't wait. I must get to town with the money."

"There's no must about it. We've got to wait."

"Well, I won't wait!" persisted Rob. "They ain't going to leave here to-night, of course. The whole amount of the matter is, Sam, we've lost our boat."

"Looks like it, but what are you driving at?"

"Let's run down to Bussey's place. There's always boats there under the shed. We can pull one out, launch her, and row down."

"No getting back before morning under these conditions."

"Well, I can't help it. Hush! Here comes those fellows down the steps. They've given us up."

But as strong as the temptation was to remain and watch the strikers, Rob was resolved to go.

He saw no use in waiting.

"Bussey's place" was another picnic ground further down the shore, to reach which would not take a good runner more than fifteen minutes.

The boys were both splendid runners, and they were there in less time than that.

Rob broke open the shed where Bussey kept his boats in winter, and by striking match after match they were able to select what they considered the best one, and also two pairs of oars from the rack overhead.

They then ran the boat out into the rain, launching her with but little difficulty.

"By gracious! we ought to have a lantern," said Sam, as Rob tossed the money-box into the boat, stepping in himself.

"What's the matter with taking that one we saw hanging up in the shed? We can pay Bussey for it, or return it to him when we get to town."

"I'll go back and get it," said Sam. "If I hadn't been an ass I should have thought of it before."

Just as he started Rob heard in the distance the sound of the paddle wheels of the night boat down from Annandale, a large town at the head of the lake.

"By George, the very thing!" he murmured. "If we could only make them take us aboard the Minnewannock we would be in Whiteston in a little over half an hour."

"Hurry, Sam!" he called, when all at once as though in echo of his own voice came that dismal cry for help.

Just then Sam came running back with the lantern ready lighted, and jumped aboard the boat.

"Did you hear it?" asked Rob, pushing on.

"What?"

"That cry. There it goes again!"

"Help, help! Save me! I'm sinking!" came to them over the lake.

The fog had lifted now, although the rain still continued. The lights of the Minnewannock could be just distinguished rounding into the Ramshorn, and the beating of her paddles distinctly heard.

"Who the mischief can it be?" exclaimed Sam.

"We must find out. We can't leave a human being to perish, Sam, money or no money."

"Just what I say. Hello, there! Hello!" yelled Sam.

"Help! Help!" came the answering cry, seemingly at no great distance from them.

"Who are you?" bawled Sam.

"Squire Adams! Help me! My boat's upset! I can't hold out much longer."

"Ned's father!" gasped Rob. "Well, here's a go!"

Now, few men in the neighborhood of Whiteston would have cared to risk their lives to save that of this Shylock, whose avariciousness had gained him the hatred of everyone for miles around.

Not so with Rob Rockwell, however.

The true-hearted fellow never hesitated one instant, and this in spite of the fact that Squire Adams was the bitterest enemy his father possessed.

"Where are you, Mr. Adams? Holler again!" he shouted.

"Here! Here! Oh, be quick! The steamer is coming! I shall be run down!"

And indeed there was danger of it.

Following the direction of the voice, the boys pulled with all their strength.

Again and again the shout came.

Evidently they were drawing nearer, but still they could see nothing of the squire.

"Blamed if he ain't a regular Will-o'-the-Wisp! Where the mischief is he!" growled Sam. "We'll be run down ourselves in a minute."

The steamer was drawing fearfully near. It would be impossible to keep on in the way they were going much further unless they cared to be caught in her swash.

Suddenly the fireman opened the furnace door and a broad stream of light shot out over the lake.

"There he is!" shouted Rob, pointing to a boat bottom upward bobbing about between them and the steamer, above which a man's head could be seen.

And so strong was the light that they were able to recognize the money lender, whose position was truly pitiable, for he was an old man, and the water was decidedly cold.

"Coming, squire," shouted Rob. "We see you!"

The words were no more than spoken when the stillness was broken by a fearful report, and the horrified boys saw the Minnewannock fly into a thousand fragments amid a burst of flame which lighted up the lake with an unearthly glare.

"Great Scott?" gasped Sam.

"The boiler's burst!" cried Rob, as though this was some tremendous discovery.

Now suddenly the whole heavens seemed ablaze, for flames had burst forth from the wreck.

Shrieks, groans, and wild imprecations could be heard as the terror-stricken passengers leaped from the burning steamer.

Meanwhile, the rowboat was pitching and tossing wildly, for the explosion had had much the same effect as an earthquake would have had.

"Help! help! Save me! I'm going under!" cried Squire Adams, desperately.

He was not more than twenty feet distant from the boat now, and plainly visible, for everything was as bright as day.

But what were the boys to do?

Instead of one voice shouting for help it sounded to them as though there must be fully a hundred.

Looking back at the picnic grounds, they could see the strikers putting off in the *Raven*.

"Help! Help!"

"Save us!"

"This way with your boat!"

Voices were yelling all about them.

"Fifty dollars for your boat!" bawled somebody among the crowd in the water.

"One hundred dollars!" yelled another voice, in a different place. "Come this way!"

"A thousand dollars for that boat, this way!" shouted still a voice, above all the rest.

"What's to be done?" gasped Sam.

"Squire Adams first!" said Rob, decidedly.

They had never stopped rowing.

In a moment more they were alongside the overturned boat.

Rob caught the sinking squire by the collar, and aided by the old man's own efforts, managed to pull him aboard.

"That you, Robby Rockwell?" chattered the miser. "You—you—you shall be well paid for this. Never you fear!"

"Gentlemen, here's a boat if anyone can right it!" roared Rob, paying no heed to the squire.

He pulled on toward the nearest of the mass of heads bobbing above the water.

It was a young girl of great beauty.

The pitiful pleading of her upturned face even in that brief light touched Rob Rockwell's heart.

"Too late!" gasped Sam, as Rob stood ready to grasp her.

With the boat still twice its length from the girl she sank suddenly.

To Rob it was a terrible sensation.

He had expected to have his hand upon her in one instant. It was a like as thought that death should come between them like this.

"No. Not too late! I'll save her yet!" he cried, springing up and throwing off his pea-jacket, at the same time kicking off his low shoes.

"No, no! Don't leave me! Don't do it," groaned Squire Adams.

But Rob, never looking, plunged boldly into the lake.

CHAPTER VII.

ROB'S LEE REWARD.

"Keep off! Keep off!"

"Help us! Help!"

"Save us!"

"Name your own price, young man! Anything you like to take me aboard."

"I'll double discount him whatever he offers you!"

Such were the cries of those who came swimming around Sam Dixie's boat, to all of which Sam made but one response, emphasizing it by flourishing his oar while Squire Adams did the same with a revolver, which being thoroughly saturated, lock, stock, and barrel, would not have gone off under any circumstances.

Now it seemed very hard—almost inhuman—but what could Sam do?

Each of the unfortunate passengers of the *Milk-Cream* who were now swimming for their lives, every man, boy, and girl, there was a crowd of belling heads about it, all clamoring to be taken aboard.

But the boat was only a small affair; five would have been all it could hold—six would have swamped it.

Toward it Sam could now discover Rob Rockwell swimming, bravely fighting his way toward floating fragments of the burning wreck and the drowning wretches all about him, supporting on his arm the silent form of the young girl he had started to save.

Of course, Sam was saving the place for Rob, and Squire Adams joined him in the fight from the sheer love of monopolizing everything he touched.

If the miserable miser had been alone in the boat he would have pulled straight for shore without raising a hand to save one of those who on every side put in a piteous appeal for help.

"Hold hard, Sam!" yelled Rob, "I'm coming!"

"Keep off! Keep off!" shouted Sam and the squire, flourishing oar and revolver.

In a few moments more Rob had reached the boat.

"Take her, Sam! I'll pull! Don't pull, now! Squire Adams, shift a little more to the left."

They managed it between them without mishap.

Back in the boat now with the drifting form at the old miser's feet, her head drooping against his knee, Rob found his place and threw out his oars.

"Can't you take one or two more of us?" called a man swimming near.

"I can take only one! Don't try to crowd me, or we'll all be drowned!" answered Rob. "See, here's another boat, and there are others coming!"

It was the *Raven*, which was also loaded down now.

Putting out from different points on the mainland, several boats could be seen pulling for the wreck. They belonged to the farmers along the shore, who, aroused by the explosion, had lost no time in sending to the aid of the sufferers.

Who shall be the first?

There was an old man first, supported in the water by a younger one. He was selected and taken into the boat just as the *Raven* came up.

With more glee and noise than they had displayed in some of their other doings, only two of the strikers had put out in the *Raven*.

One of these Rob recognized as Peter Parfitt, a leader among the strikers, a man who had threatened his father's life more than once.

As the *Raven* ran in among the swimmers, this man gave a loud cry.

"My daughter!"

"I know it!" said Rob, quietly. "You take charge of her, Parfitt. I'll take on somebody else."

"Rob Rockwell, you're an angel if there ever was one," said the striker, brokenly. "And after what has happened, too. Better let me get in there and you take your own boat."

Rob was nothing of a fool, and the old man was right—but not until Sam had called a yell and pointed out to Parfitt that it was Rob, and no one else, who had taken his daughter from the lake.

By this time the other boats had come up and the work of rescue began in earnest.

Squire Adams went with the boat and they took the old man from the water.

The last thing Rob remembered was the money, and it was handed over to Squire Adams by Parfitt, the old man clutching it tightly with his hands.

"What's the money?" asked the squire.

"I needn't tell that before you take it here," said Parfitt. "Save it like money," said the squire, who had spoken all day of the claim of a twenty-dollar bill, and now it was time to pay up.

sort of use in trying to dodge them, Crook whipped a paper out of his pocket and made a rush for Rob.

"I arrest you, young man!" he shouted. "I arrest you in the name of the law for robbing the safe of the Whiteston Mills during the fire night before last. Here's the warrant, all straight and regular. You must come along with me."

"I'm ready to go with you, sir," he replied, with a strong effort to appear calm, "but I wish you'd take me to my father first."

"Take him to jail where he belongs!" cried Nick Gallon.

"Shut up your head, you miserable gammill keeper!" roared Gallon, who despised Gallon, and consequently lost his temper on the spot. "I'll tell him where any boy, and I can prove it. Rob hasn't been out of my sight twenty minutes in the last week."

"Take that, you little snipe, and mind your own business!" cried Gallon, giving Sam a brush across the cheek.

"And you take that—and that, you big stuff!—and that!" roared Sam, emphasizing each by a highly scientific blow, for Sam was the crack sparrer of the school.

Most decidedly had Nick Gallon waked up the wrong man.

He got one in the nose, another in the eye, and a third in that portion of his anatomy which, in polite pugilistic language, is known as the "bread basket."

The sum total of the whole business was that Nick Gallon found himself knocked out and sprawling on the ground.

"Stop, Sam, stop!" cried Rob. "You're only making matters worse."

But Sam wouldn't stop, and the constable didn't dare to let go of Rob to make him.

He kept dancing round Nick Gallon, calling out to know if he wanted any more, and there's no knowing how the affair might have ended had not a mob of strikers, having heard the noise in a neighboring saloon, came rushing out and taken a hand in.

The result was that half an hour later Sam Dixon found himself a prisoner with Rob in a dirty little cell in the town lockup, committed on a charge of assault and battery and resisting an officer.

And all this happened before the clock struck nine. Things were not going very smoothly for the Prince of the School just then.

When the boy returned to Bixley's to look for the money they met with no success.

No boy had seen it, nobody knew anything about it; and Rob could only conclude that some of the strikers had contrived to take it while their boat lay alongside of his.

But unsatisfactory as was all this, the events now just transpired were worse.

What was Rob's amazement upon being taken before the chief of police to find two strikers present, ready to swear that he had been lurking around the mill office just before the fire?

It was on this testimony that the boy was held, and to make matters still worse, when Rob sent for his father the man never brought back that Col. Rockwell had not yet returned to town.

The result was, Rob on one bench, Sam on another after the fashion of the day, and the day on them.

For a moment nothing happened, then Sam, who always saw the bright side of everything, burst into a hearty laugh.

"What's the fun you going to the ball this evening?" he cried. "I'll be there later than ever."

"I'm not going. This is no laughing matter."

"The last No, I tell you it ain't. Not this evening. He'll be there evening. Say, Rob, what's that I hear under the door?"

The bench to which Sam referred was the one on which Rob sat.

Rob stooped down and picked up a crumpled letter, or rather an envelope containing a letter, for it bore no address.

"What is it?" repeated Sam.

"Nothing, I guess," replied Rob, pulling out the letter.

But his face changed as he read what was written on the paper.

"What did I tell you?" he cried. "Listen to this, Sam Dixon."

"I'll give you a hundred dollars to prove Rockwell's son a thief. I've sworn to get square with that man, and I'm willing to pay for it. Hold out a few days longer and you'll find the Whiteston Mills will be in other hand. Then you and your friends shall have just the terms you want."

"Great Scott! That's interesting!" cried Sam. "Why don't you finish? Who wrote it?"

"I've read all there is here, Sam," replied Rob, in a low voice. "Poor father! His enemies mean to down him if they can."

The letter was without signature or date.

CHAPTER IX.

THE STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE PRINCE.

"Have you heard the news?"

"What? That Tom Collins is dead?"

"No, no! Serious now, Ned! Have you heard the news?"

"Oh, you mean about the Minnewannock blowing up last night, and killing a couple of dozen people?" laughed Ned Adams, determined to make a joke of Jack Dyer's earnestness.

It was late in the afternoon, and the day boat down the lake had brought every boy and girl in Mountainview Institute down to Whiteston to attend the ball.

Naturally, the Prince of the School being absent, Ned had asserted the rights he claimed but could never get when Rob Rockwell was around, and had been bossing the whole affair ever since the start.

But we must do him the justice to say that not a word about the hole in the ceiling in dormitory No. 10 had he breathed, nor had any of his companions.

Ned, though a bully, was true blue to the traditions of the school.

No matter how much these boys might squabble among themselves, they would stick to each other every time.

"No, no, no!" cried Jack. "Be serious now, old fellow. Where have you been, that you haven't heard it?"

"Home, for one place, busy arranging about the ~~entertainment~~ for another. Go on with your great news. Don't keep a fellow in suspense."

"Well, then, Col. Rockwell was on board the Minnewannock last night."

"You don't say!" cried Ned, in genuine amazement.

He was interested now, for he had just been talking with his father about Col. Rockwell's affairs.

The squire, it seemed, held a mortgage on the mills, which, being the principal source of the Rockwell's wealth, had

"fallen into the hands of the Whiteston family," and for this reason, as the mill was the only property left, Col. Rockwell had not the power to do what he wanted with it.

"Rockwell's son is the only one who can do that," said Ned.

"He's not here, though," said Ned.

"The deuce you say!"

"Fact."

"I tell you that father ain't got anything about meeting Col. Rockwell. He was on the steamer, too."

It would have sounded strange enough to Rob and Sam Dixon had they known that Squire Adams had been running around town all day claiming to be one of the survivors of the wreck.

"Was he?" said Jack. "How did he escape?"

"Oh, he was picked up by a boat; he didn't say who did it."

"Well, I am glad he was one of the lucky ones, for your sake, Ned; but that ain't all my news. Here's the bombshell—Rob Rockwell has turned up."

"Where?"

"In jail."

"Jack, you don't mean it!"

"Fact. Arrested this morning. Where he was all night dear knows!"

"But what did they arrest him for?"

"Robbing the mills, and Sam Dixon with him, for licking Nick Gallon. Now we know how the money came to be in the cockloft, Ned."

"Serves him right; but I don't believe a word of it, just the same. It can't be true. Rob was with us in the boat the night the mills were burned."

"Ned!" said Jack, mysteriously.

"What is it?"

"Every fellow in the school knows all this but you. There's going to be fun to-night."

"What do you mean?"

"Wait and see."

"Tell me now."

"Nix! Promised not to. What's your costume?"

"Spanish cavalier—you know that."

"You'll have to join the gang, old fellow. Masks meet at Levy's cigar store at midnight. Be there!"

And off went Jack Dyer, leaving Ned very much perplexed.

It was a horrible night that night of the masquerade ball of the Whiteston Social Club.

It rained hard that night. Ned had gone again, and the wind blew so hard as to shake the old lock-up to its very foundations.

To Rob it seemed very odd to sit there in the cell and hear the band tearing away overhead. They could have almost have heard the feet of the dancers, if it had not been for the howling of the wind, for the lock-up was behind the town hall, and it was in the town hall that the dance was given.

Not a soul had been near the boys all day, except the turnkey, to bring their meals, and now, shortly after midnight, Rob, who could not sleep, found himself pacing up and down the narrow cell, thinking, thinking, always thinking, while Sam lay curled up on the bench snoring like a woolly mammoth.

At the conclusion of affairs when all at once, above the bawling of the wind, Rob heard a tap on the glass of the great window.

At first he thought it was the rain, but then in a minute, tap—tap it came again.

"Who is there? Who! That you, Rob Rockwell?" called a voice outside.

He hurried to the window and tried to look out, but it was too dark to see anything.

"Who you want to see?" called the voice again.

"Who are you? Who are you?" shouted Rob, as loud as he dared.

"One of the boys. We've come down from the hall. I'll open the middle bar—it's been sawed through."

Rob caught the middle bar and gave it a yank.

It came out in his hands so suddenly that he went tumbling over against Sam, who woke up with a growl, asking what the matter was.

"The fellows are outside here," whispered Rob, eagerly.

"By George! You've pulled out one of the bars!"

"You bet! Here goes for the window!"

The window flew up as though its weights had been greased, and a burst of rain came dashing in.

"Hello, out there!" breathed Rob.

No answer now.

"Where in thunder has he gone to?" said Rob.

"Who was it?" asked Sam.

"Blest if I know. He called through the window that he was one of the boys, and told me to pull on the bar."

"He knew what he was talking about, then."

"I should say so! Here goes! I can crawl through there, Sam, and I am going to do it, too!"

Now, Rob was a slim fellow and he crawled through the opening without much difficulty, but Sam, being stouter, found it harder work.

"Heavens, I'm stuck!" he called. "Catch hold of my hand, Rob, and give me a pull."

Of course, he thought Rob was right outside, but no answer came save the howling of the wind.

"Rob! Hey, Rob!" called Sam, a sudden terror seizing him.

Still no answer.

Sam wriggled, twisted, and turned, and at last went through the bars in such a hurry that he fell plump into a puddle just outside the window.

"Jerusalem! This is interesting!" sputtered Sam.

"Rob! Rob! Where are you, Rob?" he called as he picked himself up.

But there was no answer.

All was still save for the band in the hall, which was playing Bedelia, and the howling of the wind.

Rob seemed to have passed from behind the prison bars to vanish into the night.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE MASQUERADE.

"Rob! Rob! Where are you, Rob?"

At the risk of bringing the turnkey down upon him, Sam shouted:

"Rob! Rob! Where are you, Rob?"

There was no answer.

Upstairs in the town hall the Whiteston brass band was braying.

"Balance to corners! Ladies change! All waltz!"

The loud-lunged master of ceremonies could be heard even above the howling of the wind.

It was a great mystery to Sam Dixon.

There was a fence on the one side of him, and the back of the town hall on the other.

There was no chance for Rob to get out of sight unless through one of the stores.

These seemed to be all tight shut, however.

He must have either jumped over the fence or run straight out of the alley.

At that time the idea of Rob's having fallen into the hands of the

He thought it was decidedly shabby in the Prince of the

School to hurry out of the alley and leave him to stumble after through the mud.

This Sam did.

He did not call again, however, being too much afraid of rousing some watchman or constable.

Just as he was about to turn out of the alley on to Main street as many as a dozen dark figures turned in.

"By George!" gasped Sam.

"Who the mischief are you?" cried a voice in a husky whisper.

Now Sam saw that they were all masked.

More than that, they all wore waterproof cloaks, such as the gipsy girls usually put on in the rain.

Under the cloaks could be dimly discerned the most startling display of gorgeous costumes.

There were red legs, blue legs and green legs.

One fellow had a dazzling sword.

Another carried a pasteboard mandolin.

But the faces which passed about Sam were the most startling.

One wore a huge pair of spectacles, bristling mustache and a hideous nose.

Another was made up to look like his satanic majesty, and carried a pitchfork with pasteboard tines.

Another was a jolly sailor with a fiery red nose.

Each represented some character more or less striking.

If Sam had not known of the masquerade all this would have been highly startling, for they began to hustle him about, demanding to know who he was, when all at once someone said:

"Why, it's Dixon!"

Then in suppressed voices the school cry was given, and the cat was out of the bag.

"Oh, it's you, fellows, is it?" breathed Sam. "Where's Rob?"

"Just what we want to know," replied Pete Smith's voice.

"Ain't he in the lock-up?"

"How did you get out?"

"We were going to break down the old shebang and rescue you."

Everybody seemed determined to talk at once.

It took at least two minutes to make the situation plain.

This was Jack Dyer's mysterious scheme, and Ned Adams was there with the others, dressed as a cavalier.

Mean and treacherous Ned might be—was, in fact—but, as we told before, the boys of Mountainview Institute were accustomed to stick to each other through thick and thin.

But where was Rob?

The boys searched the alley, tried the back doors of every one of the stores under the town hall, climbed over the fence and explored the "pound" which lay behind it.

All in vain.

No trace of the Prince of the School could be discovered.

"This is a put-up job. This is more of the strikers' work!" declared Sam, and all the boys allowed that he was right.

"Let's go for the sheriff," suggested Jack Dyer.

"I shall go up to Col. Rockwell's house first," said Sam. "If he has returned he ought to be told first of all."

A fresh gloom suddenly upon the party.

"You haven't heard the news?" said Jack Dyer.

"News—what news?"

"Col. Rockwell was on the Minnewatnack last night. He hasn't been seen since."

"Great Scott! You don't mean it!" gasped Sam.

"Close it, fellow! Someone's coming!" breathed Little Joe Ring.

Just then the lock-up door was heard to open, and Constable Crooks put out his head.

Now, of course, the boys went dusting around the corner in the liveliest kind of style.

They would not have been true boys if they had done anything else.

"Get back to the ballroom! Get upstairs!" breathed Ned Adams.

The town hall door was open and nobody on guard, for all the tickets had been taken up long ago.

Before the clumsy constable could get around on to Main street every boy had vanished.

Whatever else Crooks may have thought, he certainly did not suspect the masqueraders of breaking into the jail, for the night was too dark and stormy for him to see more than the dim outlines of their forms.

Jack Dyer and Pete Smith hustled Sam into the dressing-room and provided him with a Spanish student's costume and a mask.

They had provided one for Rob, too, in anticipation of the rescue.

But mattels had not turned out the way they expected, and it was only Sam who went with them on to the dancing floor.

"Keep cool, Dixon," said Pete Smith. "We can't do anything about this business to-night, but Prof. Plummet is to be in town the first thing in the morning, and we'll lay the whole case before him. He'll help us, you may be sure."

But Sam had another plan.

Of course, for him to make any move just then would only result in his being locked up again.

To help Rob he must keep free—that was certain.

"Just as soon as it is daylight I'll hunt up Parfitt," resolved Sam.

He made up his mind that the leader of the strikers should be given the opportunity to show his gratitude to Rob Rockwell for saving his daughter's life.

Now the band struck up a waltz and the dancing began again.

As Sam was not the boy to see others enjoy themselves and not take a hand in, he was soon on the floor dancing with a graceful pink domino.

After that there was a quadrille, and after the quadrille another waltz was called.

This time the pink domino had been carried off by a fierce-looking Italian brigand and Sam was looking about for another partner when someone touched him on the shoulder.

It was a mask wearing the costume of a priest.

"Hush! Don't speak a word, Sam! It's me!" breathed the priest.

"Rob!"

"Yes—Rob!"

"Great Scott!"

"There—there! Don't do it! Don't give me away."

"But, Rob—"

"Come to the dressing-room," whispered the priest, in a voice scarcely audible. "Come, now, I've got something to say."

CHAPTER XI.

UP THE LAKE IN THE STORM.

When Sam Dixon reached the dressing-room he found Little Joe Ring there, but saw nothing of the priest who had vanished among the dancers.

Joe was dressed as a page, but he had taken his mask off. Sam was about to do the same, but Joe interposed.

"I wouldn't if I were you, Sam."

"Why not? It's safe enough. Nobody has been up here to look for us yet, and it ain't likely anybody will come now."

"You can't tell. Say, what brought you out here?"

"I bet you that it was the same thing that brought you here, Ring. I can read it in your eyes."

"Read what?"

"A priest told you to come here?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who it was?"

"No, I didn't recognize the voice——"

"No, but maybe you will the face!" spoke a voice behind the clothes rack.

The boys looked around the mass of coats and hats and were astonished to see Rob with his priest's costume on the floor in the act of getting his legs into a very shabby pair of old pants.

"Well, I declare! How in the world did you get here ahead of me?" cried Sam, in a suppressed voice.

"Well, I didn't fly."

"But——"

"Shut up, Sammy! There's big business on hand. You remember that letter?"

"Will I ever forget it? But say, Rob——"

"Hold up, I tell you. I've made a big discovery. Get into your togs and meet me at Shay's Wharf in ten minutes."

"I'll do it."

"Do you want to go with us, Ring? I want another fellow, and I picked you out."

"Guess I do. I'll go to Halifax to oblige you," responded Joe, immensely proud of being chosen by the Prince.

"Then don't speak to me and don't look at me till we're on board the boat. If I'm not there you can know that the constable has scooped me in."

Sam and Joe threw off their disguises and fixing for the street ran down to the wharf in the rain, reaching the Raven without having encountered a soul.

"Tumble in," said Sam.

"You go first. I'm afraid to drop—I can't swim much."

Sam jumped into the boat and helped Joe down.

By the time they were both snugly stowed away Rob came down the wharf, dressed in clothes as rough as those of any laborer.

He jumped into the boat and immediately put off, heading up the lake.

The wind was with them, and the Raven went spinning through the water, but not a word would Rob speak until every thing was in good running trim, except to tell his companion to wait.

At last they were beyond all apparent danger of pursuit.

"I'm glad I have. If I had to take things as easy as they could in the rain, bursting at the same time into a hearty laugh.

"Now then, Sam, fire away," he said.

"Fire away at what?" replied Sam, a little sulkily, for he didn't like being ordered about in this fashion.

"Q—"

"I don't know as I've got any questions to ask."

"I'm not mad, and I know it, Sam Dixon!"

"Well, I ain't mad, either. I don't think you've made me just right, though."

"Why not?"

"Well, did you go that time? Why didn't you wait for me?"

"Well, I went into the pound. There was a board loose in the floor, and I went right through."

"Did you ever me holler?"

"Yes."

"Well, didn't you now?"

"Yes."

"Well, what was it?"

"Well, I couldn't. That's enough."

"May be enough to suit you. It don't satisfy me, though."

"Don't be ugly, Sam."

"Well, I feel ugly. You and I were together in this snap, Rob Rockwell, and I consider it mean for you to desert me the way you did. Now, that's the plain United States of it."

"Now, Sam——"

"Oh, there's no use in saying 'Now, Sam,' unless you mean to give a fellow some explanation."

"I've given you an explanation. I told you I went to the pound."

"Yes, but why?"

"I can't explain that."

"There it is again. All mystery. Look at the way the fellows rallied. Even Ned Adams was there, and they would have got us out of the lock-up just as sure at fate."

"Ah, but we were one point ahead of them, and were already out."

"Come, now; tell a fellow all about it."

"I can't do it, and there's no use pressing me," replied Rob, seriously. "At least, not now."

"You saw the fellow who called to you through the window?"

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"I can't tell you that."

"Oh, botheration! keep it all to yourself, will you?"

"I intend to."

"There's some things I could tell if I wanted to—things that you wouldn't like much, either."

Now Sam could have bitten off his tongue for saying these words, but it was too late.

Rob's face turned deathly white.

All his joking manner was gone in an instant.

"What do you mean? What do you know?" he demanded, fiercely.

"I—I'd rather not tell you. I—I ought not to have spoken, Rob!"

"Yes, you ought! It's about my father! You've heard something."

"I have."

"What is it?"

"Don't ask me, Rob."

"But I don't ask—I insist. Is it about my father?"

"Yes."

"I thought as much. Now what?"

"Yes, it's about your father, and I'm sorry I said it, but it can't be helped now. Your father—brace up, old man—your father was on the Minnewannock when she exploded her boilers last night, and hasn't been seen since."

"Ah, is that all?" said Rob, with an air of great relief. "I thought you had heard something new."

"Then you knew?"

"Yes."

"He was on the steamer?"

"I heard so."

"But you know that he got off all right?"

"I heard that, too. I——"

"Say, somebody's coming!" interrupted Joe Ring, suddenly pointing over toward one of the numerous islands with which Lake Tuscola abounds.

"Don't care! Let 'em come! I'm where I want to be!" cried Rob, turning the boat nose toward Fan Harbor.

The wind was right with them now, and the Raven flew over the water at an amazing speed, sending the spray all over the boat in great showers.

It was a rowboat which had passed from the Island

All they could see was her light and a few dark shadows behind it.

Sam had not fully settled in his mind whether the boat was following them or not, when Rob ran the Raven into the mouth of Fish Creek, dropped the sail, and called to Sam to get out the oars.

"Pull, pull!" he cried. "I'll lend you a hand in a moment."

"But you can't run her up the creek! It's all stones."

"Do as I tell you."

"I'm blamed if I will!" growled Sam, and then he went right to work and did it, in true boy style.

As soon as he had the sail as he wanted it, Rob took one of the oars, and by dint of pulling and pushing and poling—working the boat along any way they could—they at last came suddenly out from under the overhanging trees into a deep lagoon, the existence of which Sam had never dreamed of.

"We land here," said Rob. "I don't believe those fellows will ever find us in the world."

He pushed the Raven up against the shore and leaped out.

No sooner had his feet touched the grass than a man leaped out from the concealment of the bushes.

"Who are you? What do you want here?" he demanded in a surly tone.

CHAPTER XII.

A VERY MYSTERIOUS BUSINESS.

"That's all right! It's only me," said Rob, coolly.

"Hello," answered the man. "By gracious! it was so dark I didn't know you."

"You didn't expect me so soon?"

"Well, not quite."

"We had the wind all our way and came up flying."

"I should say you did. Beast of a night, ain't it?"

"Well, it ain't anything else. Where's your boat?"

"Oh, I pulled it up under the bushes. We can't hide that big thing of yours, though."

"Not very easy. We are followed, too, that's the worst of it."

"Not" cried the man. "You don't mean it!"

"Yes, we are; but they may not know the way in here."

"You've no idea who they are?"

"Not the slightest. Strikers, probably."

"Let them come. We've got the start. They won't know where we've gone. Tell your friends to tumble out. There's no time to be lost."

Sam and Joe, full of curiosity, climbed out of the boat, and Rob led her fast to a tree.

He did not introduce them to the stranger, however.

In fact, until they were well seated there was no further talk.

The stranger now picked a dark lantern, and started along a narrow path, which presently led them into the thick woods.

Here they were sheltered from the storm, in a measure, but they might as well have been out in the rain as under the dripping trees.

Not that it made much difference.

They were wet to the skin already, and a little water in the air could not hurt them.

They walked in single file, with the stranger ahead and Jim and Sam bringing up the rear.

After they had walked a hundred yards or so the stranger stopped.

"Now, what money do you suppose there was in the box?" he asked.

"I'm sure I don't know. We didn't count it," answered Rob.

"It was your friend here who was with you?"

"Yes, Sam Dixon. This is him next to me."

Now, this playing second fiddle did not exactly suit Sam, but he saw that there was serious business on hand, and he did not like to interfere.

"You are sure you took the box from the rowboat into the sailboat?" continued the stranger.

"Oh, yes; dead sure."

"Who took it from you?"

"Squire Adams."

"Did he know what it was?"

"He guessed—didn't he, Sam?"

"Yes, he said it sounded like money," answered Sam. "But he didn't hold it a minute."

"You don't think he took it?"

"Oh, no," cried Rob and Sam in a breath.

"Squire Adams is as close as the bark on a tree, but I can't think he would steal," added Rob.

"He'll lie, though," said Sam, very decidedly.

"What do you mean?" demanded the stranger.

"Why, he's been giving it out all over town that he was on the steamer last night," said Sam, proud to be able to tell them something they did not know.

"You don't mean it!" cried Rob. "What cheek! Has he forgotten that we exist?"

"Men like Adams often overreach themselves in their meanness," said the stranger. "But here we are at the clearing, and there's the house."

They had come out of the woods all in a moment.

Before them rose a small hill, upon the top of which stood a rough, unpainted house with barns and out-buildings attached.

It was now well on toward morning; indeed, but for the clouds the gray of dawn must have been visible in the east.

"Hold on a minute," said the stranger, in a low tone. "If those fellows are coming after us we may as well know it."

They listened, but not a word was to be heard.

"We've got the start of them, anyhow, and we must work quick," said the stranger.

He shut off his lantern now, and putting it in his pocket led the way up the hill.

It took but a few moments to reach the house.

All was dark, but from the signs around the building it was evident to Sam that the place was occupied.

"Now then for the ladder," whispered the stranger. "It's in the carriage house over there. Will you boys get it while I keep watch, for in case anybody stirs it is very necessary that I should be around."

Rob started for the carriage house on the run, Sam and Joe following.

"What's up, Rob? What is it?" demanded Sam. "For gracious sake, tell a fellow. This ain't half a square deal."

"Sam, I promised not to. I must keep my word."

"But who is that man?"

"That's just what I can't tell."

"But you'll tell a fellow who lives in this house?"

"I would if I knew, but I don't. Here's the ladder; now, like a good fellow, don't ask any more questions, but help me carry it out."

"Does Joe know?"

"Not a thing more than you do," protested Joe, "but I'm willing to do anything in the world for Rob."

"Well, I guess I am," grumbled Sam, seizing hold of the ladder. "Come on! I s'pose you'll talk when you get good and ready, and not before."

"You want to get it, I tell you! You want to get it, in a will-her; then you're going to tell all about it when he asks for it."

"That's the room."

As quietly as possible the ladder was placed against the house.

"Now, listen," said the stranger.

They remained motionless for a moment, but still all was quiet.

"Who'll go up?" said the stranger.

"I s'pose I'd better?" asked Rob.

"I guess you had."

Rob ran up the ladder like a cat.

Sam and Joe watched him eagerly.

They saw him tap on the window and wait.

Then, no answer coming, he tapped again, but still with the same result.

"Try if the window will open!" called the stranger, in a suppressed voice.

The window did open.

As Rob raised it, he drew back with a low cry.

"Look—look!" he called, retreating down the ladder. "Look there!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A GHOST FROM THE GARRET.

"Look—look!" breathed Rob Rockwell, pointing up to the window, from which he had retreated down a round or two of the ladder. "Oh, look—look!"

"A ghost—a ghost!" gasped little Joe Ring.

"I'll be whipped if it isn't like one!" echoed Sam Dixon.

"Nonsense!" whispered the stranger.

But just the same, there in the window of the lonely farmhouse stood a tall figure, all in white, looking out.

It was a shade too much for Rob, and he came down the ladder in a hurry.

"Great Scott! What do you suppose it is?" he breathed.

"Just keep quiet a moment, will you?" said the stranger.

They all stood perfectly still at the foot of the ladder.

They could see the white figure moving about the room, flitting here and there, but could get no definite look at it.

Not, at least, until it came at last to the window, leaned its elbows on the sill, and looked out.

Then they could see a face peering down upon them from out of the white covering—it was the face of a man.

As far as the Mountainview boys were concerned, it was not the face of anyone they had ever seen before.

"Well, I declare! This is very singular," whispered the stranger. "That ain't the party we want."

"I— I— not," muttered Rob, under his breath.

"I—I—I like a fellow with a white sheet thrown over him," said Sam.

"Hello, neighbor! What's the trouble up there?" called the stranger, in a suppressed voice.

Sam and Joe could not help but notice that he showed no more anxiety to go up the ladder and investigate the ghost than did Rob.

They could hear the figure mutter something, but just what the words were they were not able to distinguish.

Then, to the surprise of all hands, the figure turned, put first one leg out of the window, then the other, and deliberately began to climb down the ladder.

"I—I—I—I—I—I—" breathed the stranger. "Get in there among the curtains and hold till I see what this means."

The boys could but the stranger drew his revolver and pointed it.

There was nothing to fear, however.

When the white figure reached the foot of the ladder it paused, standing perfectly motionless for several minutes.

"Hist! hist! come here!" breathed the stranger.

The boys stole out of the bushes and joined him.

There was no trouble in making out the ghost now.

It was simply a man in his shirt and trousers, with a white sheet thrown over him.

"Sleep walking," whispered the stranger. "Listen! What's this he says?"

Now, as Rob looked, he recognized a farmer who sometimes drove up to the Mountainview Institute, selling produce, whose name was Grummage.

He was muttering to himself incoherently.

His eyes were tight shut, and one glance was sufficient to show that he was sound asleep.

"I want that money, and I s'pose I'll have it," he was muttering.

"Mean old hunks! Mean old hunks!" he kept saying over and over again.

"Who is he talking about?" whispered Rob.

"Hush, hush! Listen!" said the stranger.

"Twenty dollars to run the risk of being hung," muttered the sleepwalker. "Col. Rockwell will do it," he added, after a moment. "I want that money! I want that money!" he continued, after another pause.

Then all at once he started right across the yard in the rain.

"Up the ladder, quick, Rob! See if your father is in the room," whispered the stranger.

"Follow after us," he added, as Rob started. "I'm going to follow him."

Rob bounded up the ladder and climbed in at the window.

Sam and Joe remained at the bottom of the ladder, while the stranger followed the sleepwalker, for they had no notion of deserting Rob.

They did not have to wait long.

In a moment down came Rob flying.

"He ain't there!" he said, starting after the stranger, who was just disappearing in the woods.

"So it's your father you're after?" asked Sam, hurrying along with the Prince of the School.

"Of course."

"Rob, you ought to tell me who that man is now."

"He's Detective Clickett, of New York," answered Rob, quietly. "Father hired him to look after the strikers. He says they captured father—that's all I know."

"And he is the man who collared you when you came out of the lock-up?"

"He is."

"What do you suppose old Grummage means when he talks about the money in his sleep?"

"Why, just what you're thinking about, Sam. He knows something about the money that was stolen from us."

"You're right, and I'll bet on it," muttered Sam, as they entered the woods.

It was not raining quite so hard as it had been.

On ahead the boys could see Detective Clickett's light fitting along the narrow path, and they hurried on to overtake him.

He was still shadowing the sleepwalker who tramped straight ahead, regardless of mud, bricks, and every other obstacle.

"Is this the way we came?" whispered Joe Ring.

"Sure!" said Sam.

"Look, boys, he's turning off," said Rob. "Steady, now, no noise. You can bet your life Mr. Clickett knows what we're about!"

Now, all in a minute they lost sight of both of them and

detective, for they had plunged right into the thick of the forest.

In a few moments more they caught sight of an old frame shed, and just in time to see Farmer Grummage vanish through the door.

"An ice-house, by George!" breathed Rob.

Detective Clickett had gone in, so they followed.

There did not seem to be any ice in the ice-house.

Straight across the bare floor the sleepwalker traveled, Detective Clickett was stealing after Clickett, when all of a sudden the sleepwalker caught his foot in a loose board, and went sprawling upon the floor, with a wild yell of terror, which might have been heard a quarter of a mile away.

"That settles it. He'll wake up now!" cried Clickett, springing forward.

He seized Farmer Grummage by the collar and jerked him to his feet, the sheet falling off as he came up.

"Wha—what's the matter? Whar am I? Who be you?" stammered the farmer.

"An officer of the law," said the detective sternly. "Where is Col. Rockwell? Speak!"

"Waal, neow, neighbor, I'd'n whar the kun'l is. Heow should I?" whined the farmer.

"Speak up! No nonsense!"

"Waal, I'll be gosh-blamed if this yere hain't ther ice-house! Hev I ben a-walkin' in my sleep agin?"

"Well, you just have! Speak, man, speak!" persisted the detective, as the boys crowded around.

"But I don't know nuthin' about ther kun'l."

"Very good! Then I'll march you off to Whiteston jail. Go ahead, boys. Get the boat ready!"

"Hold on!" stammered the farmer. "I don't want to get into no trouble. I don't know nawthin', jest as I said, but yer ~~don't~~ don't look in that room over thar, jest tew make sure as nobody else hain't brought him here."

Rob waited for no second hint.

Dashing over to the door toward which Grummage pointed, Rob and Sam flung themselves against it until they forced it in.

All was dark inside, but Rob thought he heard a groan.

"Hold on! I'm coming, boys!" called Clickett, and come he did, dragging the farmer after him.

"Father!" shouted Rob, as the detective's lantern was flashed in.

There lay Colonel Rockwell, gagged and bound, upon the floor.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAPTURED AGAIN.

"Well, up in my word, this is a pretty tight fit," declared Sam Dix as the Raven moved slowly down Fish Creek, half an hour after the events in the ice house.

"Oh, phew! We're only six, and she carried ten before she went!" said Rob, who was "peeing," or trying to work the sailboat out into Bear Harbor and thence to the lake.

But it was a tight fit all the same.

On board the Raven were Rob and his father, Sam, and Joe; and last, but by no means least, Detective Clickett and his prisoner.

"Well, that's what I call a pretty slick job," declared the detective. "I looked for trouble, colonel, but this sleepwalking fellow took us right to the place where you were."

"And he shall pay dearly for this outrage!" declared Col. Rockwell. "You asked me, Robert, how I came to be there, and now I'll tell you the whole story."

"I wish you would," said Robert, earnestly.

"And I want all the details, too," put in the detective. "As sure as my name is Clickett, somebody's going to smart for this!"

The colonel settled himself back in the stern sheets and began:

"You see, I was coming down on the Minnewannack, and when she blew up I was one of the last to go overboard. I stuck by the wreck while there was anything left to stick to, and when there was no use holding on any longer, took to the water."

"Along comes this fellow in a boat and rescues me. I was almost unconscious and hardly knew what I was about or where I was until I found myself in his house."

"Then you can imagine my surprise when he informed me I was his prisoner, and he and his two sons marched me down to the ice-house and left me in the shape you found me. What in the world they expected to gain by such a move I cannot imagine, but they shall be made to show their hand in the courts. I believe I should have died if——"

"Hark!" cried Rob, suddenly. "Someone coming!"

The regular stroke of oars was heard ahead of them, and at the same instant came the same sounds behind, in the direction in which they had just come.

"Hey! Hello! Here we are! They catched me an' the kun'l!" roared the farmer, who until now had occupied his place in the boat in sulky silence.

"Burn you, take that!" burst the detective, giving him a smart slap in the face.

"Hold him! Keep him quiet!" he added, hurriedly. "There's going to be trouble here!"

Rob and Sam caught the farmer between them, Rob thrusting a handkerchief into his mouth.

"Take a taste of your own medicine," he breathed.

"The mischief is done now, I'm afraid," said Colonel Rockwell. "This is all the work of those rascally strikers. Robert, give me that pistol Mr. Clickett gave to you."

He was quite right. The mischief was done.

"Halt!"

Out from the bushes on the bank rang the word:

"Halt! Halt!"

Two answering shots followed.

One came from before and another from behind.

To the utter dismay of the party on the Raven they found a boatload of men armed with clubs and shot-guns approaching in both directions while as many as a dozen very rough fel-

Lawfully appeared on either bank of the narrow water-way with guns leveled.

"Boss Rockwell, we want you and that detective feller!" shouted a voice from the bushes. It ain't no use a-kickin'. We found out where you wuz, and we'd a-had you out afore morning, only this here detective saved us the trouble, for which we are much obliged."

Resistance was useless.

Anyone could see that.

"Red McNulty, that's you. I know your voice!" answered the colonel, coolly. "You've never had anything but favors at my hands, my man; if you kill me you'll suffer for it, mark my words."

"Hold yer jaw!" roared the striker, jumping into the boat and flourishing his revolver. "Who are these fellers? You get ashore, the hull bilin' of yer, 'cept the detective an' the kunn. Quick!"

By this time the other boats had come up, and a dozen cocked revolvers covered them.

Rob was furious, and would surely have got himself into serious trouble if his father had not peremptorily ordered him not to make a move.

"Get ashore there, you little whipper-snapper! Get ashore!" cried McNulty, prodding Rob with his shot-gun.

The boys found themselves in the bushes almost before they knew it.

"You, too, hayseed! We'll make short work of the hull lot of yer!" cried McNulty, giving Farmer Grummage a prod.

"Waal, neow, gents, ye wouldn't harm a poor old man like me," chattered the sleep-walker, who had pulled the handle-chef out of his mouth as soon as Rob and the others began to shoot.

"Wouldn't we? We'll see. We are onto you, old chap. We know a thing or two."

Right there in the bottom of the boat the sleep-walker fell on his knees, his teeth chattering like castanets.

"They never com to me, an' I'll tell the hull bizness!" he growled.

"What whole business!" demanded McNulty, turning suddenly upon him.

"Where ther money is, gentlemen," whined the coward.

"Hello—hello! What's all this?" cried McNulty. "Away with 'em boys! He kin stay. You attend to them young fellers and we'll attend to this three."

But where were "them young fellers"?

The gang on the shore turned to look for them, but the boys had vanished.

"They're taken to the woods!" roared McNulty, as the boats began to move down Fish Creek. "Run 'em down. Put 'em where they won't bother us till this here biz is settled. You'll find us here on the island when you git troo yer job."

"They ain't. Lay low! They're coming," breathed Rob Rockwell, as he repeated this command.

As the gang on the shore began to move, the Mountain View boys lay low in the bushes.

The Prince of Rockdale School, I think, with all his valour, would have been a willing captive, were it not for the fact that he had been so long a time away from his father. I could never stand it."

and listened with bated breath while the strikers went chattering by.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PRINCE, FINDING AN ARMY READY, MOVES ON THE ENEMY.

"Have they gone?"

"Guess they have, Sam."

"By gracious, this is a bad business, Rob!"

"Bad enough, and no mistake."

"Oh, Rob, will they kill your father?" faltered little Joe Ring, who was completely overcome by these events.

"Not much! They know too well which side their bread is buttered. They'll hold him prisoner till he gives up on the strike—that's what they'll do."

"I wouldn't give much for Mr. Clickett's chances, though," said Sam. "He never said a word. I took him to be a braver man than that."

"He who fights and runs away, may live to fight another day." My dear fellow, you mustn't be too hard on Clickett."

"Yes; but he didn't either fight nor run," said Joe.

"He's saving his powder for a chance to use it. I'm glad he's with father. I don't believe those fellows will do any killing! All the same, we've got the best of them so far as I can, and lose time here."

The fact is, the boys had done a good deal of talking before this conversation began.

After beating about the woods for some time looking for them, the strikers had departed, and now it was up to the boys' chance to get away from Fish Creek, make for Whiteston and give the alarm.

They pushed on through the woods in the direction of Bean harbor, and after tearing their clothes, hitting their faces, and scratching their hands and faces most thoroughly, they came out upon the shore of the lake at a point a little to the west of Fish Creek.

The rain had ceased and the moon was just breaking through the clouds!

"Say, fellows!" cried Joe Ring, "there's a boat up there under the bushes, just as sure as you live."

"Bully for you, Joe! Your eyes are as sharp as needles."

"It is a boat, and must belong to old man Grummage," Rob added, when they reached the spot.

"A regular old scow," grumbled Sam, "but here are the oars in it. Shall we cabbage it, Rob?"

"Shall we?" cried Rob. "Well, I guess so! Here, lend a hand, boys, and we'll launch her. Bring that old tin pail for a bailer, Joe—she probably leaks like a sieve."

They had the boat on the lake inside of five minutes, and contrary to Rob's expectations, she did not leak so very badly.

As there were only two oars, Bob took one and Sam the other, and away they went flying with all the speed that was capable of toward Cherry Point, from which they could make a straight line for Whiteston.

"Upon my word, Rob, you like it!" said Sam. "If only my father I could never stand it!"

"Which is the best, to cry over spilt milk or try to get more? 'Twon't do father any good to—'"

"Hold on! There they come—there they come!" breathed Joe Ring.

Two boats filled with dusky figures had just rounded the end of Cherry Point.

"Pull in toward the shore," whispered Sam. "Maybe they won't see us."

"No such good luck; but we'll do it," answered Rob.

He gave his oar a twist, and they shot in close to the bank under the shadow of the overhanging trees.

On came the other boats.

"By George, I don't believe those are the strikers after all," murmured Rob, as they drew nearer.

"Can you see anything of your father among them?"

"No. Besides, what would they be doing down here?"

"Oh, we don't know which way they actually went. All that talk about going to the island may have been—'"

"Hello! It's our crowd!" interrupted Rob, suddenly. "Hey, Pete! Pete!"

"What are you about?" cried Sam. "Surely you must be mistaken."

"Not a bit of it!" cried Rob, seizing the oar. "Pull, Sam, pull!"

"I... Hen Grover!" shouted Joe Ring.

He put his finger to his mouth and gave a prolonged whistle.

"Hello! That—you—Rob—Rockwell?" came ringing over the lake.

Rob answered with the second cry, and back came the answer.

"What are you fellows doing here?" shouted the Prince, as the boats approached sufficiently near to each other to set all doubt at rest.

"Come to look for you!" yelled Pete Smith. "Say, Rob, the strikers are laying for you! We heard it all!"

"Stop rowing!" ordered Rob.

He threw down his oar, and stood upright in the boat,

"Hey, fellows!" he shouted, "the strikers have captured my father and taken him over to Parker's Island. For me to go after the constable will take all night. Who's with me? Who will help me do this job myself?"

There was no instant about the answer.

It came ringing over the lake from a dozen throats.

"We will!"

"Bully for the Prince!"

"Three cheers for Rob Rockwell!"

"Lead the way and we'll follow."

"The Prince's fellow your leader, fellows!" called Rob. "We'll drown the strikers if it takes a month of Sundays! Parker's Island is the word!"

And they certainly were a determined lot, those boys who followed the Prince of the School.

"We know who's after them, Pete Smith? I should think you'd have more sense."

"Hello! You're there, are you?" cried Pete in more subdued tones, answering Sam Dixon, who had poked his head out of the thick bushes at the extreme end of Parker's Island, known by the highly euphonious name of Poggin's Point.

"Of course we're here," said Sam. "We didn't show you fellows our heels for nothing."

"Oh, that's all right, Dixon. There was only three in your boat and six in ours—what's the matter with you—say?"

"I ain't going to say another blame word. How do we know who may be watching us. Come ashore."

"Coming! That's what we're here for, and t'other boat is behind us. Where's Rockwell?"

"Gone up on the hill to reconnoiter."

"And get captured, just like as not," said Pete, as he leaped ashore.

Five other boys, firm friends of the Prince, every one of them, followed him.

They were assisted by Sam Dixon and Joe Ring to draw the boat well up on the beach.

By the time all was made secure the other boat arrived.

Rob and Sam had reached Poggin's Point a good five minutes ahead, but it was less than five minutes from the time Pete Smith's crowd landed when a dozen of the Prince's firmest partisans stood ready to back him up through thick and thin.

"Just lay quiet here a few minutes, fellows, till Rob comes back," said Sam.

"Were not those his orders?" asked Pete Smith.

"They were."

"Then any fellows that breaks 'em will be in for a licking from me! The Prince is in trouble, and we propose to stand by the Prince every time."

"Bully for Pete!"

"We'll do it!"

"No funk in us!"

"We'll lay the strikers out cold!"

Every boy seemed to have something to say for himself and to be determined to say it.

"Say! hold up, fellows, will you?" cried Pete. "I want to find out from Sam how all this came about."

Sam went over the story.

All but about the money.

That he did not mention, feeling that he had no right to do so without consulting Bob.

"I'll bet ten dollars to one cent that Adams is at the bottom of the whole business," declared Hen Grover.

"What makes you think so?" demanded Sam.

"Shall I tell him, Pete?" asked Hen.

"Of course. Why not? Telling it to Sam Dixon is just like telling it to the Prince."

"Why, the fact is," said Hen, "that just after you fellows may have left the school, and I was one of them, I was in Levy's office, and we would lay down to have a smoke between classes."

"Well, well! And you—what did you do?" interrupted Sam, who was laughing.

"Well, now, I just did."

"What was it?"

"Heard old man Levy telling Parfitt, the striker, that you fellows had gone with a detective over to Bean Harbor to rescue Colonel Rockwell, who was a prisoner at Grummage's."

"Well, upon my word! How did Levy know?" exclaimed Sam.

"He said the detective told him. I overheard him say that distinctly."

"It beats all."

"It didn't beat us then, for I made a bee line for Pete Smith, upstairs in the hall, just the minute I hear Parfitt say behind the screen-door that he would send a crowd down to Bean Harbor right away to capture the colonel and lay you fellows out."

"Did Parfitt say that?"

"He did."

"There's gratitude for you, and only yesterday Rob saved his girl's life."

"What else can you expect?"

"Nothing, I s'pose."

"You didn't hear Squire Adams' name mentioned?"

"No; but I did see Ned coming out of the cigar store after Parfitt left, and I believe he was in there too."

"No!"

"It's a fact!"

"Here comes Rob. Better tell him."

Rob took it all very coolly.

"It don't surprise me any," he said. "The Adamses are a mean lot anyhow, as I have good reason to know."

"What have you learned?" demanded Sam Dixon.

"That the strikers have taken possession of the quarrymen's hut down the gully. It's my opinion that if we are sharp we can capture the lot and rescue the colonel without any trouble at all."

"How will you manage it?" asked Hen Grover.

"I will show you when we get there."

"But if all of that gang are in the gully they'll make it hot for us."

"I don't believe they are all there. I think some of them have gone back to town. Now then, fellows, any boy who wants to hold back is at full liberty to do so. Those who are with me in this fight will

"Fall in!"

Rob paused before the last two words, then spoke them in a low voice like a military order.

There was no hesitation.

As captain of the military company of the academy, as well as "Prince of the School," Rob Rockwell was accustomed to give orders and to have them obeyed.

Immediately the boys formed themselves in line with Sam Dixon at the front and Rob at the head of the column.

"Forward march!" cried Rob, and away they went in regular step up the hill.

For a few minutes all was silence on the shore, save for the regular tread of the boys from Rob's little army and the occa-

casional sound of their voices. At last even these sounds had died away.

Suddenly there was a rustle among the bushes, and a boy stepped out upon the beach alongside the boats.

It was Ned Adams.

The rival of the Prince was followed by Dick Ramsay.

After Dick came Jack Dyer.

If Rob and his friends could have seen them they would instantly have recognized them as three of the meanest boys at Mountainview Institute.

"Have they got over the top of the hill yet?" asked Dick, in a low voice.

"Guess they have," replied Ned.

"What are we to do, Adams?" asked Jack. "You've brought us here promising to explain. Now's your time."

"What you are to do, fellows, is to stand by me," said Ned. "Rob Rockwell is playing a mean game against my father. He is trying to make it out that the old gentleman stole that money from him last night when they were in the boat together. I propose to block his little game and expose him. We'll take him down from his high horse and at the next election, which takes place next week, be able to oust him from his position as captain."

"And elect you, I suppose?" interrupted Dick.

"And elect me. You shall be lieutenant, Ramsay, and Dyer shall be corporal. We'll have everything our own way, and what's better than all the rest, the governor says we shall have ten dollars apiece all around if we can capture Rob Rockwell and hold him prisoner twenty-four hours."

"And so this is your great mystery?", remarked Jack, for from the time when Ned had proposed to these boys to follow up Pete Smith and his crowd, which they had done, no explanation had been given until now.

"This is it."

"I don't like this business, Adams."

"Oh, it's all right, I assure you."

"And I'll back up anything Ned says," added Dick Ramsay.

"Twould be a good scheme to put the Prince's nose out of joint, anyhow," chimed one of the others, who in his own mind had determined to get that ten dollars at any cost.

"Where'll we take Rob if we capture him?" asked Jack.

"Oh, over to Grummage's at Bean Harbor. He's a friend of father's and will do anything we want."

"Well, I'll do it for you," said Jack, yielding at last. "But I think it's a mean trick all the same, Ned Adams, and no good will come of it, mark my words."

"I'll take the chances. You stick to me!" cried Ned.

"Follow your leader, boys!" he added.

And away they went after the Prince and his army over the hill.

Again there was silence on the dark shores of Long Point.

Not for long, however.

Ten seconds had scarcely elapsed when the bushes again pushed aside, and the ugly face of Squire Adams peered forth.

"He, he, he!" the miser chattered. "Nelly! I found

He'll make a great business man—great! If I can only keep Rockwell and his cub on this island till to-morrow noon the Whiteston Mills are mine—mine!"

It was a rascally plot.

The Prince of the School little dreamed of the real danger which hung over his father's head.

CHAPTER XVII.

BETRAYED.

"Company, halt!"

The Prince of the School gave the command.

The little army stopped to a man.

They were now half way down the opposite slope of the hill which crowned Parker's Island.

Twenty feet further on was a long, narrow rift or gully, which, starting from a point very near to Bussey's picnic grounds, ran almost through the island, but not quite, being blocked at the other end by a perpendicular ledge of granite, up which no one could possibly climb.

It was a splendid hiding place for the strikers, or anyone else, for that matter.

There was just one way of getting into the gully under ordinary circumstances, but since Col. Rockwell had opened the quarries on the granite ledge a ladder had been hung down to make matters easier for such workmen who could more conveniently land at Poggin's Point, saving them the trouble of going all the way round by Bussy's place as they came and went from their work.

And further, for the accommodation of a few men who preferred to live on the island, a little hut had been built down in the gully.

"And that's where they've taken father, you may depend upon it," said Rob, pointing to the hut as the boys cautiously approached the edge of the rift and peered down.

"What's your scheme, Rob?" asked Sam Dixon.

"Why, it's just this," answered Rob. "I watched here this morning for more than half an hour, and only saw one man moving about. It is my opinion that they've got father and Mr. Channing locked up in the hut down there, and the rest of the strikers have gone back to Whiteston. They don't mean to harm him, for that would interfere with their bread and butter, but they do mean to hold him prisoner till he gives them all they demand."

"Yes, yes, that's all right, but what's your plan?" persisted Sam.

It is planned to the ladder.—

"We can go down there and capture the hut," he simply said.

"I don't think so," answered Sam, shaking his head.

"I don't think so. They're all wind, those fellows. They won't do any shooting. Do you see that little shed there by the foot of the ladder?"

"Well, what of it?"

"That's the tool-house. There's probably fifty big iron drills in there. We can arm ourselves with those, and I'll bet we succeed."

It was a risky piece of business; but boys seldom stop to fully calculate chances.

While little Joe Ring with his sharp eyes kept watch on the hut, the boys drew back out of sight and discussed the scheme further.

As usual, the Prince of the School carried the day.

"We may as well be hung for an old sheep as a lamb. We'll do it!" cried Sam Dixon at last, although, truth told, he had sided with Rob from the very first.

"Good!" said Rob, "and I shan't forget it, you bet. Father is a little under a cloud just now, but he'll come out all right. Hey, Joe—Joe!"

"What's the row?" said Joe, coming up.

"Seen anybody?"

"Not a soul."

"I don't believe there's anybody there at all," said Hen Grover.

"We'll soon know," said Rob. "Now then, fellows, single file—march!"

He walked straight to the ladder.

It was about thirty feet long, and hung flat against the perpendicular wall, being held in place by two stout ropes, fastened to trees above.

Rob swung over the edge of the ladder, and without a moment's hesitation started down, half expecting, it must be admitted, to get a shot in the back before he had reached the ground below.

But nothing of the kind occurred.

Sam followed, and after Sam came Hen Grover and the rest of the boys.

When they broke into the tool-house there was not a soul in sight, and it was just the same when they came out again, each boy with an iron drill, anywhere from two to four feet long, clutched in his hand.

"Now, then, fellows, make straight for the door of the hut," said Rob. "We'll all throw ourselves against it, burst it open and go in with a rush."

"And take 'em by surprise, I see," said Sam. "But what if they shoot?"

"Forward!" cried Rob, drowning Sam's remark.

"On the double-quick—march!"

Away flew the boys down the slope.

The hut was not more than twenty feet distant. Not a sign of life was visible in or about it.

Bang! Plump! Smash! Crash!

If anyone was inside, he, she, or they must have thought an earthquake coming.

The door tumbled in, lock and hinges breaking, and the boys tumbled in after it.

They kept their feet, however, and were just in time to see a man, with no other garment to cover him but a shirt, go through the window on the opposite side. His bare legs presented quite a picturesquie appearance as they went under the roof.

"What's the matter—what's the matter? You had better be careful or the law will overtake you yet!" cried a voice from an inner room.

"After him, fellows! There's father!" shouted Rob, in triumph.

While Sam Dixon, Helen Grover, and several others bolted through the window after the fugitive, Rob burst into the room beyond.

"Robert! Oh, my son!" cried Col. Rockwell's hearty voice.

"Father! Thank God, they have not harmed you!" echoed Rob, springing to the rescue.

There lay the colonel, fully dressed, tied down upon a dirty bed with a strong rope.

"There was no one else in the hut," Joe Ring declared, as he came running in, when Rob, with his jack-knife, cut the cords which held his father down.

There was an affecting scene for a moment.

Evidently Col. Rockwell was much shaken by the treatment he had received.

"Where's Mr. Clickett?" demanded Rob, as soon as he got a chance to speak.

They were out in the open now, and hurrying down the gully in pursuit of the boys,

"Why, Clickett jumped overboard before we had gone very far," declared Col. Rockwell. "I'm sure I hope the poor fellow is not drowned, but he would do it. He whispered to me just before he made the move that he could certainly swim ashore and bring help. Oh, Robert, there's a vile plot on foot against me here. You don't know all."

"I know enough, father. But first tell me where the strikers are."

"I don't think they are on the island, my son. They went right away when we reached Bayly's; that is, all but the fellow who brought me up here. You see, they had disarmed me, Robert, and had my hands tied; otherwise——"

"Hullo! There come the fellows back again!" cried Rob, suddenly.

"They are running. Something's the matter!" gasped the colonel.

"Look—look! There's the strike! Kill them!" shouted Joe Ring. "There must be more than a hundred of them! Oh, Rob, what are we going to do?"

"Lay low—lay low! Here they come!" Sam Dixon was yelling.

Further down the gully a perfect mob of the factory hands could be seen in full pursuit.

"There's the father, Robert!" groaned the colonel. "We might have got to get up on the bluff and then throw it down."

"You see, father. I can't desert the boys."

"No, no! You don't, and I won't desert you. But I fear the boys will kill me. Sam, Sam has stirred them up to it."

For the moment they stood in silent waiting.

Then, suddenly, the rest of the mob came up.

It was a short distance.

"They're coming, Rob! They're coming!" yelled Sam.

"I see them! On to the ladder, fellows! Keep a stiff upper lip."

Never had boys run faster than the Prince and his party ran then.

"Hold on there, or we'll shoot down the last mother's son of you!" yelled a voice behind them, recognizable as Parfitt's. Now at that moment they were close to the ladder.

Indeed, Rob had just whispered to his father that he must be the first to ascend, when all at once there was a loud shout on the bank above, and the big ladder came crashing down into the rift.

A moment later and the lives of Col. Rockwell and several of the boys would not have been worth a rush.

"Heavens! We are lost!" groaned the colonel.

"Ned Adams' work, by all that's bad!" gasped Rob, for there stood Ned, Dick Ramsay, and Jack Dyer on top of the bluff.

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm square with you now, Rob Rockwell!" shouted the miser's son. "Go back and meet your friends, for you'll never get up out of that hole this way if you wait a hundred years!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

PARFITT, THE STRIKER.

"Surrender!"

Thus yelled Parfitt, the leader of the great Whiteston Mill strike.

He came dashing up the gully at the head of a dozen or more desperate men.

"We shall have to yield, boys," said Col. Rockwell, very quietly.

And, indeed, there was nothing else to do.

With the fall of the ladder all possible chance of escape had been cut off.

Meanwhile, Ned Adams and his crowd had disappeared from the bluff above.

"We won't surrender! We'll fight them to the last!" roared Rob, made desperate by the treachery of his schoolmates.

"No, no! I won't have it!" declared his father.

"Surrender—surrender!" yelled Parfitt, and the cry was echoed from a dozen throats behind him.

Col. Rockwell walked out into full view and held up both hands.

"We surrender!" he shouted. "But beware how you hurt these boys."

It was all over in a minute, much to the disgust of the Prince of the School and his friends.

We pass over the first excitement which followed.

Guarded by three men, Col. Rockwell was taken back to the quarryman's hut.

Heckled by Parfitt, the remainder of the mob followed Rob and his friends down the gully to the bottom, and led them into the basement.

Here they found Farmer Grummage looking very glum.

"This is a nice how-de-do," he groaned, as soon as the boys were left alone with him.

Realizing that there was nothing to be gained by getting excited, Rob had cooled down, and so had the other boys, who always took their cue from the Prince.

"What's the matter? Why do they keep you here?" asked the Prince, who was pacing up and down the darkened room, for the heavy wooden shutters were tightly closed, and there was no outward sign to show that there was anything concealed inside.

"Blamed if I know! Say, yer Rockwell's boy, ain't yer?" "I am."

"Where's yer father?"

"In the hands of the strikers."

Grummage groaned.

"This comes from mixin' up with the quarrels of you town fellers," he declared. "If I'd a-minded my own business I'd a fared better; yes, I would."

"What made you do it, then?" asked Rob, winking at Sam to !? his tongue.

"I did it 'cause I was a fool, that's why. I'll bet a dozen of !? I will give you ten in twenty dollars afore I'm through."

"Look here, Mr. Grummage, I'll give you ten dollars if you'll tell me the whole story," said Rob.

He had ten dollars with him which his father had given him a week before.

Knowing from Detective Clickett that this man had it in his power to solve at least part of the mystery surrounding these unusual proceedings, Rob was willing to sacrifice it to obtain the information which he felt sure would be highly beneficial to his father's cause.

Twenty dollars was a mighty sum to the farmer.

"Well, I don't why I shouldn't take you up," he said, gruffly. "They've all gone back onto me. I dunno why I should talk to them."

"It's all right," said Rob, shaking the bill at him.

"All right. Hand her over young man, and I'll tell."

"No, no. You tell and then I'll hand the money over."

"Well, then, it's all along o' Squire Adams."

"I'll tell 'em!"

"Sam, I talked to me yesterday and told me to be on the lookout when the steamer come down ther lake, for her b'iler bust last night bust, an' ef she did bust an' Col. Rockwell come along he would like to catch him and take him to my place."

"Well, it's all right! He must have bribed the engineer to do it to the steamer if he talked like that!" cried Sam, for he and all drawn around the speaker and were listening intently.

"I know you all think that," said the farmer. "But that's not the way it is. The b'iler did bust, and I got it for the b'iler. He came my way and I captured him. Now, I got him, and I don't care if I do get before ther b'iler bust, I'll catch him to me."

Sam and the Prince.

"Yes—no. Adams agreed to give me a hundred dollars an' he didn't."

"What?"

"He didn't hev no money by him, he said, but I know some-thin' else. Guess I may as well tell the full."

"You won't lose anything by it, Grummage. Sooner or later my father is sure to get out of his troubles and he is sure to stand by you."

"Well, then, here goes. The squire told me that you had robbed ther mills, young man, on the night of the fire. That he seen you bury the money box right up back of this here place, an' that he was going to prove it onto yer. Like a fool I hollered out that I knew whar the money wuz, an' ther strikers captured me an' here they've held me ever since, tryin' ter make me tell what I don't know, an' that's jest what ther money box is hid."

"And is that all?" asked Rob, scarcely able to contain himself.

"Every blame thing! Give us ther money. I shall want it to pay lawyers with afore I git through, I'm afraid."

Not a word was spoken by the boys as Rob gave up the bill.

The matter had assumed altogether too serious an aspect for idle talk.

Yet talk about it they did later on, for the whole day passed and still they remained prisoners in the bar-room.

Not a soul came near them.

The situation was growing very serious.

Bussey's doors and windows were not made to yield to any ordinary efforts.

Although the boys tried it in every possible way, they did not succeed in breaking out.

Now, it is easy to imagine the state of mind in which the Prince and his followers found themselves by the time daylight came to make its way through the cracks in the shutters.

Grummage had gone to sleep on some old bags behind the bar.

The boys were killing time the best way they could, when all at once they heard someone at the door.

"At last!" cried Rob, springing up. "Now, then, fellows, it's our time! Whoever it is, we'll show fight, and try to force our way out. As to stayin' any longer in this place, I want."

They listened.

Outside someone could be heard moving about, but soon the sounds died away, and all was still again.

"Pshaw! that's a fake," said Sam, disconsolately.

"Hush! There he comes again," whispered Joe Ring.

This time a key was heard grating in the lock and Parsitt, the leader of the strikers, entered alone.

The boys waited, and the bar-room would have been a wonderland if the man in a tattered bed had held up both hands.

"Hold on, boys! Hold on! I come as a friend!" he cried.

"As a friend! You're a pretty friend!" sneered Sam.

"Stop! Don't speak him! Let us hear what he has to say," cried the Prince.

"You are a young fellow, and you'd better hear me. I

have not forgotten the service you did me last night," said Parfitt, carefully closing the door.

Still there was some muttering among the boys.

Farmer Grummage did not awake.

Now Parfitt produced a dark lantern, and removing the slide, set it down upon the bar.

"Boys, I'm your friend as far as I dare to be," he said in a whisper, "and that, I want you to understand, ain't very far."

"If you're my friend you'll release father," said Rob, hotly.

"Hold on now, Prince," said the striker. "I believe these fellows call you Prince; I just want you to understand one thing."

"What is that?"

"It is that I'm not your father's keeper. I'm your friend for what you did for my girl last night."

"I don't take any particular credit to myself for that."

"I don't forget though. Wait—don't interrupt—I'm going to confess certain things to you boys, and I do it at the risk of my life."

Parfitt paused.

He was very pale. It was evident that he had been through a desperate struggle with himself.

"It's just here, young Rockwell. This whole strike business was worked up by paid tools of Squire Adams!" he exclaimed. "They've rung me in as leader. They've nearly ruined us all. They won't let me release your father. They've tried to fix the robbery of the mill safe on you. They—they—they—"

But Parfitt got no further.

He was thinking of what Rob did for his daughter, perhaps. At all events, he burst into tears.

It was a solemn scene to witness.

A dead silence seized the boys.

But Parfitt soon recovered himself.

"The long and short of it is, that old squire Adams means to fore close on the White-ton Mills to-morrow," he said, hurriedly. "I can't tell all; there's a certain paper which will prevent his daftardly act that's lost, and he's wild; he's outside now—he's just landed at the pier, and I've been watching for him this two hours. Come on, Rob Rockwell—you and that friend of your'n—but the other fellers must stay behind."

"Do as he says, fellows," whispered Rob. "Come, Sam."

Parfitt, meanwhile, had opened the door and was looking cautiously out.

"It's all right! Come on, and don't make as much noise as a couple of crows," he breathed.

They stole down to the end of the long platform which ran in front of the building.

When they reached the angle they could see a light flicking along the bushes back against the hill.

"There's the old watch now," whispered Parfitt.

"What's he doing?" breathed Rob.

"Can't you guess?"

"By gosh, I know!" cried Sam, eagerly.

"Come over and watch him; and then you'll look like a brother. I can tell you," said Parfitt.

"And you?"

"I'll stay here."

"You will release my father?"

"I can't promise that. No harm shall come to him, however."

"Come, come, or we shall be too late," whispered Sam.

They stole over toward the base of the hill, keeping well in the shadow of the building, until they reached a point from which they could make one straight dart across to the thick bushes, which they did in a hurry.

Pushing the bushes aside as noiselessly as possible, they caught sight of Squire Adams.

He had a spade in his hand, and there was a lantern on the ground.

He was prodding about here and there, evidently searching for something which he did not know just where to find.

"It's the box you're thinking of, I suppose," whispered Rob.

"Of course. I should think you would have guessed."

"Oh, I thought of that fast enough, but there's something else—hush! He has found what he is looking for, whatever it is."

The miser had given a sudden grunt of satisfaction, and began to dig in good earnest.

In a moment he stooped down and pulled the money box out of a shallow hole.

"I told you so," said Sam.

"Hark! What is he saying," breathed Rob.

The squire was muttering something to himself.

Now he laid the bow down on the ground, put his foot on it and started to pry open the lid.

But the box was not locked.

Rob had only stuck it together with a wooden peg.

The box flew open with a rush and the miser went sprawling on his back.

"Now's your time," whispered Sam. "Make a dive for it, Rob."

"No; wait."

Squire Adams picked himself up, muttering.

Seizing the lantern he tumbled over the contents of the box with great eagerness.

"Not here!" he muttered. "Not here! Then where can it be? If Col. Rockwell has it my schemes are ruined. It must and shall be found."

He hastily picked up the box and turned.

But he started back with a cry of dismay.

"Hooray!" shouted Rob, dashing out of the bushes, wholly forgetful of Parfitt's caution. "Take him, boys! Take him!"

There stood the whole crowd of boys behind the miser.

They surrounded him as they stood there with the sum money in his hand.

CHAPTER XIX.

A NIGHT MOVE ON THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

"To the boats! To the boat!" cried Rob.

"The boats! Why, the boats are at Parfitt's! I told you so."

If their lives had depended upon it these boys could not have kept still.

"This is an outrage! Don't you teach me!" sputtered the miser. "I—I am very desperate when I'm roused. I—I'm roused now! You'd better look out what you do!"

"Shut your mouth!" cried a voice.

"You blasted old thief!"

"Go bag your head!"

"Go fall into the lake and drown yourself!"

"Duck him in the lake."

These and similar cries rent the air.

"For Heaven's sake stop their noise or my friends will be the death of me," whispered a voice almost at Rob's feet.

He looked down and saw Parfitt crouching on the ground.

"If you have no mercy on me," whispered the striker, "think of yourself. The gang will surely hear and be down on you in a moment."

"Stop! Stop, fellows! Not another loud word," called Rob in suppressed tones.

"Your boats are at the float. He stole them. I found them and I brought them around. Take him to the school and search the old bell tower," prompted the striker in the same suppressed voice.

Rob took this hint at once.

Some words dropped by his father a few weeks before had given him a key to the situation.

"Trust me," he whispered, and Parfitt crawled away.

Rob made a dash for the miser and wrenched the box away.

"I'll keep that, you old thief," he said. "Hustle him, fellows! Hustle him down to the float!"

It did not take long to do that.

The squire made but a feeble resistance.

There were the boats—the whole of them.

The miser recognized them and grew furious in his rage.

"Twon't do you no good!" he cried, glaring at Rob. "You'll—
—you'll see!"

"In with him!" ordered Rob. "Gag him if he don't hold his tongue."

The boys but no time—not a minute.

They put the miser into the boat in great shape.

All hands then boarded the others.

"Where to?" demanded Pete Smith from the boat of which he had taken command.

"Back to the school!" ordered Rob. "Give way!"

The boat dashed in the moonlight, and the boats moved away from the float.

Not a boy even thought of Grummage, until they were well started.

"Let him stay where he is!" cried Rob, when Pete Smith called for silent. "We have no use for him."

The boat sped straight across to the narrows. Rob's boat followed.

As they drew near Thimble Island, a man ran down from the thick grass, which covered it, and began waving his hat and shouting.

"Help! Help!" he shouted.

"What do you want?" roared Rob.

"Want—to—be—taken—off! Want—to—see—you!"

"Who—are—you?" called Rob.

But the answer was lost with a strong gust which at that moment swept over the lake.

"We'd better see who it is, hadn't we?" asked Sam.

"That one of your friends, squire?" asked Rob, turning to the miser, who had not spoken a word.

"I ain't got nothing to say to you," muttered the squire, "cept to say that I'll make you sweat for this."

But Rob only laughed.

Meanwhile the man was still walking up and down the beach on Thimble Island.

"We may as well take him off" said Rob, and calling to the other two boats he ordered them to pull ashore.

"Why, it's Detective Chickett!" cried Sam, as they drew near.

It was the detective, sure enough.

"Hush! Don't make so much noise," he said, as Rob drew nearer. "I thought it was you, Rob Rockwell. Come ashore as quick as you can."

The boats were soon in the little cove, where the detective eagerly awaited them.

"I've been here all day," he said, as Rob leaped ashore, "and I began to think that no one would ever come to my relief, but as it is, you are just in time."

"In time for what?"

"In time to rescue your father. The strikers are here. They are in camp on the top of the hill right in the thick woods, and they've got your father prisoner."

"No."

"It's a fact! There are six of them, and I haven't a weapon about me—those fellows cleaned me out. That's why I say you're just in time."

Quick as a flash the Prince of the School turned to his army.

"Come ashore, boys!" he ordered.

"Why, who have you there?" demanded the detective, as the order was being obeyed.

"That's Squire Adams, and we've got the money!" said Rob, proudly. "There's a lot more to it, too, which I'll tell you later on."

"Better tie him and gag him, and leave him behind. Give him a taste of his own medicine," the detective declared.

Squire Adams sputtered away at a great rate as his sharp ears caught these words.

But not for long.

Rob attended to the tying and gagging business himself, and he did it most expertly.

"Take the cars and follow us," said Chickett, "and upon your life make no noise."

"Single file! Right shoulder square!" ordered Rob, as they entered a narrow path cutting the trees, which led straight up the hill.

"Now, not a word! Not a word, I say!" ordered the detective.

"How far is it?" asked Rob, by way of keeping this command.

"Only a little way, but don't talk. They may be all asleep and we may accomplish our purpose without any difficulty if we don't give the alarm."

"Silence!" ordered Rob.

And in silence they marched up the hill.

"Careful—careful!" whispered Clickett, as they drew near the spot.

The words were scarcely spoken when a man stepped out of the thicket and presented a rifle.

CHAPTER XX.

WHERE ARE THE BOATS?

"Halt! Who goes there?"

Thus cried the striker on guard at the end of the wood path.

He thrust his shotgun right under the nose of Detective Clickett, who happened to be ahead.

"A friend!" whispered Clickett, mysteriously.

"If you're a friend you've got the password."

It was too dark to see anybody's face as they stood.

"I've just come from town. I haven't had a chance to get the password," replied Clickett, when all at once there was a rush from behind him, and a boy leaped upon the sentinel, stopped his mouth with one hand, bore him down to the ground, and with the other snatched his gun away, flinging it back upon the path.

It was the Prince of the School.

"Excuse me, but there's been talk enough in this case; we don't want to give this fellow a chance to wake up his companions. Put the handcuffs on him, if you've got 'em, Mr. Clickett, while I gag him. Here, Sam, help me hold him down."

"Great Scott! It's them infernal schoolboys again!" muttered the captured man, as the handkerchief went into his mouth.

The detective was ruffled, and he showed it.

"Oh, well, if you propose to run this business, run it!" he said, and started to walk away.

"Don't get mad, Mr. Clickett. Father will make everything all right with you. What we want is to get him. Do you know just where he is?"

"Yes, I do."

"Tell me, quick! If I can get him alone without a fight so much the better."

"They've left three little lads out of the bunch. Just at the time your father was in the middle one; but I don't see any reason why you should suddenly——"

"Hold on! It's just the notion that's seized me. I don't know why, but I've got an idea that Sam and I can do better than the whole gang. By George! now I come to look at this fellow, he's one of those who were on that scaffold the night Ned Adams died at it. Here take charge of the box, Mr. Clickett. Question him and perhaps you can find out some

thing which will throw light on the mystery which hangs over this whole affair. Come, Sam!"

What had seized Rob Rockwell?

It is hard to say. It would have been hard for him to have told himself.

Sometimes the Prince was seized with sudden notions that it seemed impossible to help following.

Such a notion had taken possession of him now, and with the striker's shotgun in his hand and Sam Dixon behind him, he hurried off along the path and disappeared, much to the relief of Pete Smith, Joe Ring, and the rest, who were by no means anxious to come to a hand-to-hand tussle with the strikers, if the truth were told.

Now, Detective Clickett was a man of common sense.

Rob was his father's son, and Rob's father had promised him a big reward.

Therefore the detective pocketed his pride, drew his revolver, removed the gag from the mouth of the handcuffed striker and set out to make him talk, prompted by Pete Smith, who, of course, knew all about the affair of the boat.

The result was very satisfactory.

Thoroughly frightened, the striker told the whole story.

He gave the names of the parties who had fired the mills and robbed the safe.

He stated that there was dynamite in the box on the boat, the remainder of what they had used in their work on the safe.

He wound up by stating that Squire Adams had hired them to break open the safe, steal the money box and convey it to the loft of the old bell tower.

What the miser's motive in this strange proceeding was the striker professed not to know.

That he had some scheme in his mind to work Rob Rockwell's ruin there could be no doubt.

"By George, this is a big thing," thought Clickett. "That boy was right."

"Here they come! Here they come!" whispered Joe Ring at the same instant.

Dusky forms could be seen moving toward them along the wood path.

In a moment Rob came hurrying up, his father following, and Sam bringing up the rear.

"By gracious! I've done it!" he whispered, hurriedly. "Make for the shore! Those fellows are onto us. They're all armed. Hark! Here they come!"

Even as he spoke loud shouts could be heard behind them.

"Shall we leave this one?" demanded Clickett.

"Don't hurt him! Don't hurt him!" pleaded the colonel. "Poor misguided fellows! They don't know what they are about."

"Have you found out what you wanted to know?" asked Rob, hotly.

"All and more!"

"That's all right, then! Here goes! Let's get out of here and rush, follow, for the boat!"

And Rob and his father followed the two boys down the hill.

As may well be imagined it took far less time to go down the hill than it did to come up.

Meanwhile the shouts died away behind them.

"Did you have any trouble, Rob?" asked Clickit, as they ran.

"Not a bit. We found father in the middle hat, just as you said. He was tied hand and foot, but there was no guard. Of course, I cut him loose in no time, and it would have been all right and they would never have been the wiser if Sam had not gone and sneezed."

"Which I couldn't help," laughed Sam.

But before anybody could say another word they came out onto the beach.

Rob was ahead and he gave one despairing shout:

"The boats! Oh, the boats!"

The boats were a hundred feet from shore.

They were tied one to the other, and were trailing along like a naval procession, drawn by a boat in which sat three boys and the old squire.

They were Ned Adams, Dick Ramsay, and Jack Dyer.

As the boys appeared on the beach with Col. Rockwell, the fellows in the boat set up the school cry.

"Ah, there, stay there!" roared Ned. "We were laying for your most noble Prince! We've blocked your little game."

He might have said more had not his father tottered to his feet at the imminent risk of upsetting the boat.

"You—you—you shall sweat for this!" he stuttered, as he always did when excited. "I—I—I'll have them mills, Rockwell, spite of all creation. Yer can't produce no receipt and yer know it. Yer a fraud! Yer—";

Then Ned pulled him down, and the boats sailed away into the gloom.

CHAPTER XXI.

PRISONERS ON THE ISLAND.

"Ruined! Hopelessly ruined!"

It was Col. Rockwell who spoke.

He stood hopelessly wringing his hand upon the beach.

"What is it, father? What does that old wretch mean about the mills?"

"... it's a long story, Robert, a long story. I've been very much involved and in return for money loaned me by Squire Parfitt, I gave him a bill of sale on the whole property due to him, to-morrow. There's one mill burned, but the two left will, I'm afraid, surely fall into his hands."

"Dear father—"

"Oh, it's no use talking! He's a fraud of course. I paid him half the money a month ago and he gave me a paper agreeing to wait six months for the balance, but in the confusion of the strike it got lost and can't be found."

Rob was silent.

Finally the voice of Parfitt, the leader of the strikers, floated to the mind.

"I'm a little disappointed," Parfitt said.

Parfitt had given the paper which would save his old comrade if he could find it.

He had not been able to have it sent.

Bob explained to his father.

But how to get to Mountainview was the question.

They were still prisoners on Thimble Island, which was out of the regular track of boats moving up and down the lake.

There was no way off but to swim, and the nearest point on the mainland on the Mountainview side of the lake was half a mile, with a still greater distance to the other shore.

They stood there on the beach talking over the situation.

Meanwhile nothing could be seen of the strikers.

"They've got a big boat around on the other shore, and I guess we'd better go round and see what we can do about getting hold of it," said the detective at last.

But even in this matter disappointment awaited them.

There was no boat to be found anywhere on the shore of Thimble Island.

They went all around it.

"Can those fellows have left?" queried the detective, when they reached the spot from which they had started out.

It was impossible to decide the point then, but when morning dawned they soon found out.

Fearful of after consequences in case they were recognized, the six strikers had left this island at the first alarm.

Col. Rockwell was in despair.

"It's no use, Robert, the Adamses have got me foul," he said. "I'm a ruined man."

Rob and Sam Dixon looked at each other; they had been talking together for some time, a little apart from the rest.

"If we can get the paper it will be all right, I suppose, father?"

"Yes, but there's the great big 'if' in the way. Adams is a fraud, and the paper will prove it. Like an a.s. I told him it was lost, and he promised to give me another. This is the result."

"Well, I don't want to encourage you, father, but I think—"

"What? What?"

"That I know where the paper may be."

"Where?"

"In the old bell tower at Mountainview, as I said."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed the colonel, who refused to credit Parfitt's words.

"Is the money box nonsense? I have told you what happened. You know where we found that."

"But how can we get to Mountainview, even if your idea amounts to anything? We've talked that all over, Rob."

"Swim for it!" cried Rob.

"Nonsense! Never would I permit it."

"But you can't help it this time, father. Good-by. We're off! Come, Sam!"

"Stop, Robert! Stop!"

But Rob never heeded him.

Followed by Sam Dixon, he started down the beach on the dead run.

The other boys came after them as fast as possible. Little Jim King was the last to arrive at the point nearest the Mountainview shore.

He was just in time to see Rob make a wild dive off the rocks into Lake Mountain.

"By gracious! There he goes!" cried Joe. "Good boy, Rob! Bully for the Prince of the School!"

Joe's shout was heard.

At the same instant Sam made a dive after his chum, and a general cry rang out.

"Here are your clothes, old man!" cried Pete Smith, leaning over the rocks and handing Rob a tight little bundle hung on the end of a stick.

Sam got his bundle, too, and away they went.

"It's more than half a mile, but they'll make it," declared Pete.

For a long time the boys stood and watched the swimmers, until nothing could be seen but the two bundles bobbing up and down in the distance, close to the surface of the lake.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

"Hooray! Hooray for Captain Ned Adams! Hooray for the Prince of the School!"

And Dick Ramsay, who was standing on the band-stand in the middle of the Whiteston common, swung his hat three times and yelled again.

"Three cheers for Ned Adams! Three cheers for the Prince of the School! Hip—hip—hip—hooray—hooray—hooray!"

On the ground below were gathered about all the boys and girls that Mountainview Institute could boast of, except Rob Rockwell and his little band of friends.

It was the day of the annual election of the military company, and as Prof. Plummet had wisely declared a holiday till Monday, it was determined to hold the election on the common, in order that the new captain, who ever he might be, could lead the van on the return to school.

The votes were cast—boys and girls voting alike.

"It's a shame to hold the election while my brother and all his friends are away!" declared Susie Rockwell.

"But why ain't he here to look after his rights?" asked Addie Jones.

But that was the question nobody could answer.

Nobody at least but Ned Adams and his crew, and they took precious good care to hold their tongues.

The cheering was rather feeble.

You see, when the votes were counted, even in spite of the fact that none of Rob's intimate friends were present, Ned only gained the captaincy by one majority, and of course, he voted for himself.

All the rest of the votes were for Rob Rockwell.

To shout out about Ned being Prince of the School was simply absurd.

Just as the first cheering died away three men entered the square.

"Three more for Ned Adams, the Prince of the School!" roared Dick, bound to "whip up" for his rich patron.

"Oh, drop on that, Dick—can't you?" called Ned, from the ground. "I don't want no second-hand titles in mine."

But just then a cracked voice croaked:

"Hooray! Hooray for my Neddy! Hi, hi, hi!"

It was Squire Adams.

He was one of the party crossing the common. The others were Judge Kirkwood and Lawyer Bangs.

"Shut up, father, for goodness' sake!" whispered Ned, very red, as the old miser came up, still stouting, for the girls were all tittering, and the boys made no bones of laughing out loud.

"Shan't do it, nuther!" drawled the squire. "This is a great day for Whiteston! No more strikes—no more starvin' men! As soon as that 'ere bell rings Rockwell's mills are mine!"

At the same instant the bell of the town hall struck twelve.

"Come on—come on, everyone on yer, an' see justice done!" cried the absurd old fellow. "The jedge here will fix this thing right away."

The lawyer and the judge looked at each other rather disgustedly.

The courthouse was close at hand, and a moment later all went in.

"Come!" cried Dick. "Since we're invited, we may as well go, too. This is the last act in the play, Ned. You can say what you like, but you are Prince of the School from this time out."

As most of the others had already started for the courthouse, Ned could hardly hang back.

"Great Scott!" he whispered to Dick, as they ascended the steps. "Suppose by any hocus-pocus they should have got away?"

"Impossible! There hasn't been a boat down the lake this morning. Rob Rockwell can't walk on water, and—"

They entered the courtroom and Dick stopped short, his face grew as long as his arm, so to speak.

There sat Rob and his father in the back seat, with Sam Dixon beside them.

There on the next seat was Detective C. H. Kett, and scattered about were Pete Smith, Joe Ring and all the rest of Rob's friends.

There was a stranger to Ned sitting next to the detective, to whom he was talking in an undertone.

The judge was already on the bench, and the lawyer and the squire sat before him.

"The court is in session!" called the clerk.

Lawyer Bangs stood up.

Squire Adams kept his seat.

Evidently he was aware of the presence of his enemy, for his face was deathly pale.

"I move that title to the Whiteston Manufacturing Company be given to Jabez Adams on bill of sale, executed by Robert Rockwell," said the lawyer, adding the date and other legal phrases.

Before anyone could answer, Col. Rockwell sprang up and went to the rail.

"You know these proceedings are fraudulent. I'll halve Adams' receipt in half the amount, with an agreement for payment of the balance for six months."

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 " " FRANK READE WEEKLY, Nos.....
 " " PLUCK AND LUCK, Nos.....
 " " SECRET SERVICE, Nos.....
 " " THE LIBERTY BOYS OF '76, Nos.....
 " " Ten-Cent Hand Books, Nos.....

Name.....Street and No.....Town.....State.....